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A POPPY'S TEARS

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BY

MANNINGTON CAFFYN,

AUTHOR OF "MISS MILNE AND I," "OPALS," ETC., ETC.

"The life of the poppy is the history of the man who gathers it, writ small; it cometh up as a flower, a white innocent flower reckless in its short-lived beauty. Then follows the fruit with its black potent tears—tears potent enough to wash away destinies, the love of God—nay, in the end, even the love of woman."

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL,
LIMITED.

1890.

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**CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.**

TO

HENRY MAUDSLEY, ESQ., M.D.,

This Volume is Dedicated,

AS A SLIGHT ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF A GREAT DEBT

OWING FOR NEW TRUTHS TAUGHT.

INTRODUCTION.

I WISH you fellows would step into my smoking-room one minute, I am anxious to tell you something about these people I have asked you to meet. Well, now, to begin with, there's a big fellow on the right as you enter the drawing-room—when I came out he was talking to my wife—his name is Angus Kennedy; he's the son of a Scotch landowner who died about nine months since, and left him well off. He was educated for the medical profession, in fact I believe he is a fully-fledged doctor; but of course that is all thrown up.

His friend, Paul Stewart, is the man with long, light curly hair, a clean-shaved face, and good teeth. He's a poet, and I think decidedly interesting; he has just taken a scholarship at Oxford, and is going into the Church, I believe. His father was a clergyman of some note, but died when he was a boy, and left him some two hundred a year.

Then there is one other man—the dark man leaning on the mantelpiece—his name is Moule; he's not very interesting, a queer chap, mostly cynical.

But the girl—who, by the way, is a distant relation of Kennedy's—you must take particular notice of her; her name is Miss Dorothy Luxford. She and her aunt have just taken "The Pines" down here, and these men are staying with them. She is rich and romantic, can ride, skate, fish, do anything, like a native; and is probably in love with one of these men—which, I don't know, but it's obvious two of them are in love with her. But let's go in and "vet" them, as they say of horses.

A POPPY'S TEARS.

CHAPTER I.

To know Angus Kennedy was to love him. He had brains enough to entitle him to the respect of "the brainy," his tremendous physique won for him the admiration of women, his native goodness of heart enlisted the love of the poor, and his careless *savoir faire* secured the vote of his own set.

He was the outcome of that wise crossing that is essential to the making of the best humans : a father of much practicality, perseverance, and common sense, and for mother a blue-blooded woman of much refinement. From the one he inherited his capacity to live with some intensity, and from the other an impulse to live rightly and well.

Helped of his great health, he had hitherto romped through a life that had been all sunlight, all but one three-months, the three months that followed the death of his mother.

It was during this three-months of intense misery, and while struggling through the dark valley of sorrow that these men's natures make for them, that he had found a friend with a capacity for the sympathy he pined

for, and, as is the wont of such men, he had taken him entirely to his heart.

There are no friendships that for intensity can compare with those that young men make among themselves. The love of a man for a woman is very beautiful, and during its period of incubation and early growth, helpful and soul-satisfying; the love of a mother for her child is perhaps beyond all loves blessed and pure; but neither of these can compare with the love of a man for a man. They have possibly some physiological origin, this has no such foundation; they are more or less matters of necessity, this is a matter of free will—free selection, the rush of kindred soul to soul; and yet not always “kindred,” because one finds the men that love each other often entirely unlike. The great Johnson chose for his friend the little Boswell; Carlyle selected Froude; and Coleridge left his college friends and cultivated the acquaintance of Amos Cottle.

The man that Angus Kennedy took to his heart was also unlike himself, unlike him in everything. In physique, he was of medium height, but thin and wiry; in temperament, quiet and thoughtful; in mental tendency, philosophical and poetical; a sort of man who, when the things of this world were being discussed, could honestly say with Tennessee’s partner, “I take no hand in this yer game.”

He belonged to that beautiful race of pure souls of whom the world knows nothing, because they are mute and live not after the flesh but after the spirit. They would make good clergymen if they had energy and some fixity of belief; great poets if they had a voice;

leaders of men if they could lead themselves ; but as it is they saunter through a hazy life in a fog of half-formulated theories, now and then intensely miserable and again extatically happy ; but their fellow-man has neither part nor lot in their pleasures nor their pains, and the only text of their religious life (when conventional religion intervenes at all) is "God's in His heaven, and all's well with the world."

I don't know how two such antithetical characters as Angus Kennedy and Paul Stewart ever came to love each other. It may have been that each man found in the other something he himself lacked. Anyhow, they did love each other most intensely.

The one, for a boy, was rich, the other poor ; and Angus, out of his multitude of half-crowns, in his own free-handed way did much for the poor clergyman's son. There was a great tincture of native uncultivated goodness in the composition of each of these men. In Angus Kennedy it was a natural part of his manhood ; in Paul Stewart it rather spoilt his manhood. He would have been better, from the world's point of view, if he had had more of the devil in him.

Years hence, perhaps, when our debating clubs have done with Free Trade, Reform Bills, and the relative merits of poets who differ fundamentally, they may possibly choose as a fit subject for debate, "What percentage of the Devil in a man is necessary for his perfect development?" or to put it differently, "Why does the prodigal son always get the fatted calf?" In the race for beautiful women, as in the striving for a mother's love, the good boy is always nowhere. It is

only in goody-goody books that virtue and worth go hand in hand, and these books, if you could gauge men's hearts, are never quite believed.

There came a time when these two men separated; the one—Paul Stewart—went to coach for a scholarship, the other, to George's to be made a doctor of.

And when they met again, two years after, they were both changed. Paul Stewart had in the two years gone through that indescribable tragedy of *reformation* -- the labour pains and travail of a soul seeking its destiny. Almost unhelped of man he had trodden step by step that terrible road that leadeth to the peace that passeth all understanding and all efforts to describe, which so few seek and fewer find. Ill content with the dim light of the schools, fashioned for a younger world, he had—I cannot say buckled on his armour, because that implies some energy and some fixity of purpose, and of these he had nothing, but—been forced on by the divine current of evolution (or what you will) through the “Everlasting Nay”—through the “Centre of Indifference” into the God-given glory of the “Everlasting Yea.”

Some of us who knew something of the intuitive greatness of him envied him his greatness, but I doubt now, knowing all, if he was to be envied. It is better to be in the world and of it, with all its happy brotherhoods, than to be a little nearer heaven and alone. There is no loneliness like the loneliness of great hearts; the path heavenwards is whitened with the dry bones of men who have died alone, unblessed and un comforted of their fellow-men.

And what had two years done for Angus Kennedy ? He also, remember, was a child of Nature, made after another pattern ; he, too, left a quiet home with all its peaceful environments, taking with him more of the sinews of war than his fellow-students were blessed (or cursed) with, and also his tremendous capacity for living.

And the world offers no such opportunities for living as those found in a medical school amid medical students.

His nature forbade him to wade quietly into this sea of opportunities, but bade him take a header and plunge ; and plunge he did, coming to the surface once in three months when the vacation sent him back to the bosom of his family.

And great was the rejoicing of the family when he did return. He was not as yet a prodigal son, but the fatted calf was killed nevertheless ; the mother's heart was glad, and from the bottom of her eyes a new light shone. The father looked at the big fellow across the table with anxious pride ; his sisters gathered about his chair, and ran their fingers through his curls, and his younger brothers looked up to him and worshipped him as younger brothers only can, and for a month the old house, usually so quiet, threw off its lethargy, and rang all day with laughing echoes.

The effect of four years of London life upon the character of Angus Kennedy the reader must gather from the coming pages. Suffice it here to say his body was a big tenement, and into it his Maker had placed a big tenant — a great heart and soul ;

and great hearts and souls demand great surroundings. And he found them and grew in proportion ; but not exactly in the direction his good mother would have chosen.

CHAPTER II.

“WHICH do I like best? I don’t know. Do I like either of them? Again I don’t know. I am sure I hope I don’t. I should hate to be in love; no, they shall both go to Hong-Kong for me, there now!”

The speaker was a girl of twenty-two, known among her friends as “Queenest,” among those who had not the privilege of her friendship as Miss Dorothy Luxford. She was leaning over the mantelpiece in her bedroom alone, with her head resting upon her arms, and staring into the fire; she had been boating all day with Angus Kennedy and Paul Stewart, who were down staying with her and her aunt, and both of these men were in love with her.

She too was a child of Nature. You will begin to think that Nature has a large family, but you would be mistaken; these three are the only ones I know, the rest are more or less illegitimate.

Then Dorothy sat down in the little chair at the fireside and reasoned with herself, and ran through the day and its history; every look and word of these men was stored up in her memory, and she unpacked them all before going to bed, “just to have one more look at them;” then shaking her bonny arms free, she clasped

her hands behind her head, and tilting her chair back, stared as people will at the line at the top of the wall opposite, at the point where the ceiling meets it.

After a considerable silence she said, still of course to herself—and I want you to notice how very philosophical she was for a girl who would have been quite justified in allowing “her beauty to be her sole duty ;” for I ought to have told you she was very tall and very beautiful, with clear, clean-cut, classical features, a figure that was Junoesque, and a waist like the Venus of Milo, that, knowing no stays, breaks no law of art, and allows of perfect oxidization and consequent wholesomeness—

“I don’t know,” then very deliberately, “I really do not know ; you see a girl does want some one she can look up to and reverence, a big man like—like—well, yes ; but then would it not be delightful to swallow up in my love for him all the sadness and the yearning of the other, with his great black eyes ?” Then again : “I really do not know.” Nor did she know, for if one only thinks seriously of it, the chances are all against a girl when she selects a lover ; she must either entirely obey or altogether disregard the standard law that makes, in the absence of any gross abnormality, all men love all women. If she obeys it, then the chances against her are multiplied by the number of men unsuitable ; if she disregards it and sets herself studiously to work to find the, for her, best man, then she is certain to go wrong, because she is no longer natural, and good men do not select unnatural women for wives. Verily marriage, especially in English communities,

where the unchangeable English law obtains, is a great lottery. And so, in the dim twilight of her awakening intellect, Dorothy Luxford felt it.

There were two necessities within her, warring against each other, that she was terribly conscious of; the one, some hero to worship, some one to look up to, or, as she put it to herself, "to lean upon," "a still, strong man"; the other—a phase, perhaps, of maternal instinct—the consciousness of some one leaning upon her.

It was very pretty to watch these two instincts, both peculiar to good women, struggling alternately for supremacy, as she reasoned with herself there at the fireside, when all the house was mute. "He is such a big fellow, and big men have such big hearts." Then she thought of the day Angus lifted her into the saddle, and with all her good physical development what a child she felt in his grasp. Then she thought of the other, and no stranger herself in a woman's way to "the infinite passions and the pains of finite hearts that yearn," she felt drawn towards him by cords of tenderness that were heart-begotten.

Dorothy's extreme adaptability, her willingness to cling, or be clung to, places her so nearly alone—now that the good old times are dead—that one trembles at having to follow her through even a few steps of her history. Five centuries ago, in those rare days "when every morning brought a noble chance, and every chance brought out a noble knight," her smile would have been a sufficient incentive to the best among them; but in that she is neither "blue" nor a society beauty, the modern world knows her not nor knows quite what to do with her.

CHAPTER III.

AT the same hour the same night, the same momentous question was simmering in the warm hearts of the two men I have introduced to you—my hero and his friend. (I don't know yet which to select for my hero, I don't even know which man I like the best ; we will wait and see how they develop, and then decide.)

They were sitting at this time in Angus's room, his go-as-you-please room, as he called it. Both men were smoking, and each had a book on his knees, but neither was reading.

Paul was making the pretence, Angus was not even doing that, but was lying back in his chair watching the rings of smoke as they rose from his pipe.

Here's another subject for debate. Why do men watch rings of smoke when thinking earnestly ? Is it because their thoughts are hazy and ill-defined ? That both these men's were ill-defined at this moment there was no questioning ; both were thinking of Dorothy, both, in a vague sort of way, estimating their chance of success, and both wondering which man would win in the long run ; for although the subject had never been spoken of yet, they were perfectly aware of each other's feelings and aspirations. Of the two Angus was by far the

most hopeful ; his position in life was the most assured, and then his rival was poor. But he might become rich.

"I say, old man, what are you going to be ? I mean what profession are you going for?"

"I haven't a notion."

"Why not medicine?"

"I hate it as it is now—there's no mystery or poetry about it. When the medicine man was treated with reverence and looked upon with awe, then medicine was a glorious profession. But cheap literature has spoiled all that ! If one could mix a love potion, now ?"

"Ah ! by Jove, yes."

Then both men were silent again—the word "love potion" had set the same chord vibrating in both minds.

Angus was the first to speak ; picking up the same thread he continued :

"I should think you would make a good parson ; why not the Church?"

"That, too, and for very similar reasons, is now impossible. Even if I felt it to be my mission to teach, the last method I would adopt would be that of preaching. The world has had too much preaching in the past ; it is example men want."

"No," he continued, after a pause, "I have gone the whole round of creation many a time to see if I could find anything that life offers worth the having—worth working for—and I can see nothing. I used to think that to be a leader of men beauty-wards, Christ-wards (I don't use that word in its religious

sense), was the noblest of all ambitions ; but a long course of *laissez faire* literature has spoiled me for that, and now I see with infinite sadness how utterly impotent man is to alter the course of events."

"But men do alter the course of events."

"I doubt it very much ; and even the men that are supposed to, are they whose half vision allows them to be enthusiastic. No ; they whom the gods use they first blindfold."

"Is there according to you, then, nothing in this world worth having ?"

"The love of poetry, and the love of art, are the only things."

"Nothing else ?"

"Nothing else."

"Nothing else ?"

"Well, there is one other love, perhaps—the love of woman. I don't think I would quite exclude that."

"I should think you wouldn't, when it, of all others, is the one refining influence of life."

"Or damning."

"Why do you say that ?"

"My dear fellow, don't you know perfectly well that the two first loves I mentioned are omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, and the other is often transient and always varying ?"

"If those are your views, I shall be very sorry for the girl you marry."

"You need not be. The girl I marry, if I do marry, will have a very different time of it to other women, I can tell you."

"In what way?"

"Well, I shall in the first place make her my companion—educate her. We will be as men together—we will drink together the clear wine of life without its sickly sediment. We will

"Walk hand in hand to the gate."

You remember old J. N. Hawkins, don't you?"

"Yes, he was a third year's man when I joined. What of him?"

"Well, he is married. I knew him all through his engagement, and talk of the ecstasy of young love, I never read or heard of anything like it! Well, as I say, he was married two years since—and look at him now!"

"Why, what's happened to him?"

"Nothing, only the total downfall of all his hopes."

"But I thought they were very happy together?"

"So they are, as things go; but compare all his golden dreams with their sombre realisation. 'Tis his own fault, I admit; he was fool enough to think they would be always young, and that they, at any rate, would never know anything of 'love's sad satiety.' Well, they have been married two years, and now he finds that though his wife is very lovely to look upon, yet they have neither thought nor ambition in common. He still dabbles in poetry, and he told me the other day that sometimes when he has written a good line he rushes into the drawing-room—as men will—to read it to her, and she listens dutifully and says: 'How sweetly pretty! Would you mind stirring the fire now you are here?' And he, poor beggar, stirs

the fire and goes back to his den, and pines for the good old days at college, when birds of a feather flocked together, and every man could find in the hearts of his friends a ready market for his wares, and get a good price for them, more than their worth, in genuine congratulations. My God! How I pitied him as he told me all his troubles, but broke in every now and then with 'But, old man, she *is* a grand girl, nevertheless.' "

"You are an awful heretic, Paul, upon my word you are. I suppose you have never been in love with any one?"

"Indeed, I have! I believe I am a greater fool than most men that way, but I am not fool enough to suppose a necessity is always a luxury. A wife may be either; she is seldom both."

"But in our list of loves, old man, we left out the principal one. I mean the love of one's own children; surely that is a perfect love?"

"Yes, I believe it is quite unique, and yet, something like the love for a good line written. The love of Tennyson for the 'Mort d'Arthur' must have been very similar in its intensity and in its character, to the love of a father for his child. 'Twas essentially a part of himself, that poem, and I can picture him dwelling on every tone and harmony of it as a fond father on the movements and features of his child."

Then there was another long pause, broken by Paul.

"Do you know, old man," he broke in, "I often wonder when I hear of a certain man being in love with a certain girl, what part of her character it is that

attracts him. Sometimes the girl is very beautiful, and then men say it is her beauty ; but the man, very likely, has no capacity for loving the beautiful, so it can't be that. I've noticed 'tis seldom money ; a man is very far gone before he deliberately marries for money. 'Tisn't companionship either, because in conversation, I have discovered that that idea has never struck them. And yet these mediocre souls go mad for once, become quite enthusiastic and write rhymes."

"Yes," broke in Stewart, who felt that these remarks had some slight personal import, "and feel them too."

"No doubt they feel them for the time most intensely. But, look you here, old man, isn't the whole thing most perplexing ? Here are two women loving two men ; the one because her hero is at once

A man, and folds her with his arm,
A god, and holds her with a charm ;

the other because, like poor old Charley at your hospital, he cannot keep straight without her strong guiding hand, nor out of the clutches of the police if she's away. Now, are these two people under the influence of the same law ?"

"Probably, and under your favourite law, that all men love all women unless there is something abnormal on one side or the other. But, as a matter of fact, old fellow, it's another of those things that a fellow can't find out. There is only one thing I believe in, and that is, that there is no matrimonial salvation for the man who goes into the matter studiously, as he would buy

shares in a company ; who selects his wife as he selects his profession. Look at J. J. Lewis."

"What about him?"

"He, you know, was a double first man—a gold medalist and a Fellow of his college. Well, he went to his brother's factory at Manchester, and from among the girls there—who, remember, are only girls from a natural history point of view—picked out one with good looks and a fine physique, but with a brain that—but for blasphemy and a knowledge of evil—was an entire blank. Well, he proposed to her, and she accepted him on his own terms, which were, that she was to come out from among all her old associates ; go to Germany and Paris for three years, and be educated under the best possible tutors ; come back and be married. Mark you, this scheme of his was the outcome of years of thought and most anxious deliberation. She came back not reformed, but re-formed, a different creature, a perfect Galatea. None of the *blasé* languor of your society beauty about her ; but the touch of refinement had suddenly awakened her into a life of energetic appreciation of all things beautiful. And to that was added the knowledge of the fact that she herself was beautiful."

"But did not her self-consciousness, the knowledge of her own beauty, harm her?"

"Indeed, no! There's a strange law about self-consciousness that I have worked out, and that applies equally to men and women. Every man worth anything knows his own worth, and every beautiful woman knows her beauty. That professed self-abnegation so much admired is really assumed. I never mind a man's

knowing his worth or a woman her beauty as long as they don't bore you with it, and try to live up to it. Well, she knew her beauty just as your cousin did after seeing her own portrait and asking naïvely, 'Am I really as pretty as that?' He had her dresses even made after his own heart, and the little trim hat she wore he chose. By Jove! old man, had you seen them as I saw them, walking round the Grosvenor Gallery together just after ten, when there was no one but ourselves there, you would have thought that he, anyhow, to use a vulgarism, 'had struck it rich.' There was no finery about her at all. She wore a perfectly plain ulster, into which she might have been melted and poured like wax, it fitted her so perfectly. She actually *walked* at his side. You know what I mean, she didn't waddle as women and ducks do. She wore no stays, I am sure, from the shape of her. Every now and then she took his hand in hers and looked up into his face as Galatea did into Pygmalion's, or as Alcestis might have looked into that of Hercules, and, if you think of it, for the same reason. This man had gone to hell for her, and brought her back with him, and breathed into her the breath of life."

"What a lovely picture! What a lucky man! Didn't he ever say anything about his success?"

"Yes, perhaps I ought not to tell you, but one day he finished a long conversation by saying, 'After all, old man, I like men best!' They are the best of men, it strikes me, who can say with Byron,

Love of man's life's a thing apart,
'Tis woman's whole existence.

A man never feels himself so real and earnest as when he's in love, but to his friends he never appeared a greater ass."

"But excuse me, Paul, one moment, don't you believe a man's career is made or marred by the kind of girl he marries?"

"Not much. If a girl is actively objectionable she might drive a man to the devil if he tended that way, but careers worth anything are not made of such slight elements that a girl can twist them."

After another pause Angus gave out a long, deep sigh, and with the end of it said: "Ah! well, perhaps not, but it *does* seem to me that there are girls living, girls I have met, that could alter the whole course of my life; who would but have to put their arm around my neck, and whisper a wish in my ear, to make me strong and desperate enough to do it, whatever it was."

"'Tis beastly hard lines, old fellow, to throw cold water on you," replied Paul, as he rose from his chair and took his candle to the fire to light, "but that sentiment is, I fear, very common and very transient, and after looking round among my married friends I have come to the conclusion that it is not of very great service in after life. Anyhow, I am not going to entertain it. I am going to say to the girl I propose to, not in these words you know, but to this effect: 'Will you be my wife and join me in this tragedy called living? Will you let me live out myself with the much non-interference and the little help you can render? Will you be what men call, and I mean, the better half of

me? Better half because all forbearance and kindly helpfulness."

"You need not continue, old fellow," the other broke in, "because I can tell you what the answer will be that you get. This much-honoured one will say, 'Thank you, no, I'd rather not, if you'll excuse me.'"

"Perhaps she will; 'tis most probable, anyhow. Good night, old man."

CHAPTER IV.

PAUL STEWART escaped from "the den" just in time ; it was a quarter to twelve, he discovered, when he took his watch from his pocket to wind it up, that is to say, within fifteen minutes of the time when ghosts and secrets walk abroad. Had he remained downstairs another quarter of an hour, he would, for a certainty, have dropped the cynical air he had been assuming, and which, by the way, was far more cultivated than natural, and under the influence of that mysterious and potent spell that takes possession of men between the hours of twelve and two, would have bared his heart to his friend. It is the last pipe that is fatal to secrecy.

Stewart's bedroom, or rather the one appointed him, was as bedrooms should be, that is, half bed, half sitting-room, and one quite competent to take, as bedrooms should, an equal share with the library in the making of an individuality. Your stern, unyielding soldier of fortune is as much a child of his wooden bunk as the bunk of him, nor is your gentle lady of fashion rendered sterner by contact with eiderdown.

The bedroom that tells of, goes finally to the making of, and is the necessary outcome of a good man's character should be, as I have said, half bed, half sitting-

room, and half study. There should be at the side nearest the fireplace—which fireplace should be of the old-fashioned square open order, with ancient fire-dogs and wood embers all aglow—a deep recess, more or less divided from the room by a pair of heavy damask curtains, and in the recess two chairs, one either a lounge, or, what is better still, an iron rocking-chair, with rockers mountains high, the other a typical office-chair; the first should be near the fire, so near that the sitter's feet can rest upon the fender or mantelpiece at will, the other near the table—which table, by the way, must be large and low, and well supplied with blotting-pad, MS. and note-paper, pens, ink, and paper-knife; near the table and within easy reach I would place a revolving book-stand, and finally I would suspend from the mantelpiece an oil lamp with deep shade that could be moved at will to the table or bedside.

It was into just such a room as this that Stewart escaped on the night in question, and into just such a chair as the rocking-chair I have described, that he threw himself, and there moving monotonously to and fro, let the thoughts that downstairs would have clothed themselves in silver speech run through his mind in golden silence. As I have said, he was not the cynic he had described himself; there was a very cynical side to him, but it was more than counterbalanced by an ingrained warmheartedness. All this better part had that day, for the first time, rushed into actuality. With the touch of Dorothy's hand, as he helped her into the boat, there had come a strange magnetic influence, and with it the dream of new possibilities.

"I will not strive to win her love as the common herd might," he said to himself; "but I will educate her, and, if possible, make her my companion and fellow searcher for Truth."

'Twas a glorious sunlit picture he fashioned, as the outcome of that day's sensations. A picture of Dorothy and himself strolling leisurely across this beautiful world, hand in hand; and by the way, peering into the mystery of things as though they were God's spies.

Stewart had been too busy hitherto to read modern novels, and he was therefore quite an amateur in the science and art of love-making, which, we are told, consists mostly of "saying the same as others say, but just a little stronger," or by way of variation, "holding her hand as others hold, but just a second longer."

Nor do we think these methods would have helped him much, for his was rather an undercurrent of necessity than the mere bubbling of a young man's first passion, and therefore forbad recklessness.

From his earliest childhood and school days, when he sat apart from the other boys, and instead of playing marbles dreamed of suicide, he had been essentially the modern Hamlet, that is, far too introspective, far too studiously conscious of his environments. He was the unwholesome Eric of Farrar grown older, and now brought face to face with the first great reality of his life it is little wonder it gave him pause. To him a woman was essentially not a thing to kiss—life, to him, was too real and earnest to admit of such frivolities. The kissing and the fondling, in fact, all the data that constitute the dreams and anticipations of the ordinary

man's engaged and married life, with him should be simply incidents more or less accidental. His primary ambition should be to be a God in his own small way, and fashion this woman after his own image.

By a strange coincidence his eye fell upon an evening paper near him with an article on "The Philosophy of Domestic Discord," in which the writer divided the whole married world into three distinct classes. The first and largest, they who were wholly brutal and "row'd" as a natural consequence; the second, the purely passive, who never quarrelled because they had no opinions worth quarrelling about; the third, the healthily intense, who both loved and quarrelled much, but whose very quarrels made life piquant and possible. The article was sensible and brisk, but stopped just short of the married life Stewart had been picturing for himself and Dorothy, if only he could win her. In their case, domestic discord should be rendered impossible by early training into right paths of thought.

Then Stewart, having formulated his plan of campaign, took from his bag his mother's Bible to read, as was his constant habit, a chapter before going to bed; this was not done with any religious object, but because he found it gave his mind a depth and tone that no other book could inspire, it lifted him as neither Spenser, Milton, nor Shakespeare could, right away from the littlenesses of the modern world with its damning commerce and veneer. This evening he read the 139th Psalm, and as he closed the book, his mind went wandering back to Dorothy. "Can I ever teach her," he asked himself, "anything of this most marvellous of all

poems? Will she be able to travel with me on the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, only to find His hand leading and His right hand supporting?" Then the lamp began to flicker, and hastily undressing, he went to bed and dreamed of these glorious days to come.

CHAPTER V.

It was about half-past one when Paul Stewart fell asleep, and, as I have said, the dreams that came were as blissful and happy as dreams only can be. They were incoherent and inconsistent, it is true, but what does that matter? Consistency is one of those good things that it is very easy to have too much of. The man whose life, thoughts, and actions are always consistent is a very prosy, not to say stupid, individual, made usually for the purpose of managing a bank, or weighing sugar. I don't think such men ever enter the land of dreams; they would probably die of the shock if they did.

At half-past two the scene of Paul's dream changed very suddenly. He had been throughout with Dorothy; now he found himself leading her by the hand up to some unknown exquisite country, where summer reigned eternally. He felt the air blissfully warm about his cheeks, and flashes of sunlight were falling ever and anon across his path, and he heard her whisper, "he knew not what of soft and sweet," when, as suddenly, the scene changes again. Dorothy has left him now, and all the beauty has gone with her. He is in some terrible cavern deep down, and not a breath of air to be

had. He gasps, and, half choked, bounds from his bed to find the room full of smoke, and the house on fire. His first thought, as every man's first thought would be, is for self-preservation. Rushing to the open window he prepares to jump, and then suddenly comes the thought of Dorothy, Angus, and the rest of the household. In a moment his plans are formed ; snatching up his dressing-gown, he thrusts it into the bath at his bedside, ready filled for the morning, then, wrapping it all wet around him, he feels for the door, and, finding it, escapes into the passage only to discover that the whole house is already enveloped in flames. Then shouting at the top of his voice, "Fire ! fire !! fire !!!" he listened for some guidance from the other bedrooms. He was a stranger in the house, and choked and entirely ignorant of his position, he stood for a second irresolute, and then, all unaided as to where to go for the other bedrooms, he shouted once more, "Fire ! fire !! " Then he paused again. The passage upon which he was standing was broad and carpeted ; a few yards to his left was the staircase, and curling up the banisters were massive volumes of dense smoke, and every now and then a tongue of fire. Two or three steps in that direction brought him to the head of the stairs. For a moment he stood and looked into the furnace below, for the stairs were of the old-fashioned circular order, rising in a well from landing to landing. It was evident that, not from one place only, but from many, the fire was issuing, for the whole of the lower storey was in one mass of flames that were slowly but surely taking possession of the entire building.

Then he caught the sound of rapid breathing near him, and turning round saw a female form enveloped in a waterproof.

"Who are you?" he asked, hurriedly.

"I am the housemaid. Oh, sir, come and wake mistress and Miss Dorothy. These are their rooms—follow me, I will show you," and on they rushed abreast to the end of the passage. "There they are, sir," said the girl, pointing to two doors, and in a moment Paul was hammering away. He paused a second, and then louder than the hurried breath of the girl at his side he heard the sound of movement within. Immediately the two doors opened. At one the head of Mrs. Forbes appeared enveloped in a nightcap, and at the other that of Dorothy in all the glory of her glorious hair that hung unfettered about her shoulders.

"Come, come at once," exclaimed Paul, "the house is on fire. You have not a moment to lose. Which is the way out?"

"This, this!" exclaimed the old lady, leading the way for a step or two along the passage by which Paul and Jane had come; then stopping she turned, and in a voice broken with excitement, "Dorothy, Dorothy, are you there?"

But neither Paul nor Dorothy was following. She had darted into her room for a covering, and finding none had rushed out again, and this time Paul had, just as her aunt shouted, caught her by the arm and so, half leading, half compelling, started in pursuit of the others. They were close to the stairs when they met them returning.

"We are lost, Mr. Stewart ! The stairs are ablaze."

But Paul in a moment had decided that so far the good old oak was safe, and catching Dorothy in his arms and folding her head in his wet but now hot dressing-gown, he rushed to the head of the stairs and down them.

The conventional division of time into hours, minutes, and years, is a necessary, perhaps, but a very stupid and arbitrary one where big events are concerned. We live a longer or shorter time not by the number of minutes we can stick into a very small event, but by the number of events we can crowd into a very short minute. Will you measure the crowning hour of the statesman's career, when upon his decision hang peace or war, the life or death of men and nations, by stupid seconds ? The general at the head of his army, the surgeon called upon to operate or not, the timid girl with her "yes" and "no" struggling for utterance, such events as these crowd into one minute the history of years gone, the destiny of years to come.

Into the sixty seconds that it took Paul to pick his way with his precious burden over the burning staircase, years of anxiety and fears, and, for the matter of that, pain were condensed. He, of necessity, went slowly to avoid the weak spots, and once or twice he had to take two steps at a time to miss one much burnt. His wet dressing-gown was a godsend, and kept Dorothy from the influence of the intense heat. Her head and her hair (for in a moment of thoughtfulness he had included that from the love of its beauty) in the wet folds were safe, and after her first protest and struggle had sub-

sided she nestled passively in his strong arms. This attitude of childlike trust lent him the strength of a Hercules, and for years after, the feat of that night, weakly and muscleless mortal that he was, was a source of constant wonderment.

Once at the bottom landing he made for the front door, but the voice of Dorothy stopped him.

"To the left, to the left," she whispered, and to the left he turned.

"Now to the right," and he obeyed.

"Now put me down." Again he followed her orders, and there in the *cul de sac* of the passage they stood for a moment while she felt for the handle of the door, which, when found, she opened and passed through into a pantry. The window was instantly pushed up and Dorothy helped out.

"You come too," she cried ; "we will get a ladder. I can find one."

"No, no, they may be following ; I will run back and see."

In a moment he was again at the foot of the staircase.

"Are you coming ? are you coming ?" he shouted. But there was no reply, and for a moment he was undecided as to his next step. Then he decided to follow Dorothy's suggestion and get a ladder. In a moment he found himself in the garden, and there was Dorothy, dragging, with all the strength of despair, a ladder from the tool-house opposite.

"I'll take the ladder, you drag that truss of straw, if you can," exclaimed Paul. Well-nigh exhausted as he

was, he hoisted the ladder, and placed himself beneath it. Then pausing a moment for some guidance, and catching the sound of hammering (which was, in reality, Jane breaking a pane of glass), he made for that spot, and in an instant had it against the wall. "You come first, Jane!" he shouted through the broken pane, and then, with a blow, he dashed his closed fist through the next two, and when the smoke had subsided, he saw Jane standing over the prostrate form of the old lady, huddled insensible in the corner.

"Oh, sir, sir! save her!" groaned the girl; "save her, and save me, too, if you can!"

Fortunately the smoke only had so far reached this part of the house, and the old lady, with the fresh air blowing through the now opened window, was soon sufficiently aroused to take her position on the ladder, down which Paul assisted her. Dorothy's foot was on the bottom rung to steady it, and Jane followed.

Once safely on the grass, Stewart sent them to the stable, where they would be out of danger and comparatively warm, and then rushed up the ladder again to find Kennedy, who was sleeping on the floor above. The lower stairs were by this time quite impassable, but the ladder was there, and, when Kennedy was once awakened, escape became easy enough.

Then the two men made for the coach-house, and wrapping themselves in old sacking, awaited the coming of the morning.

But before the morning the villagers, having seen the flames, came, and as the house was past saving, did all they could for the survivors. Fortunately there was

another house, and a furnished one too, unoccupied in the village, and into this the family was helped, with the exception of Stewart, who, being severely burnt about the legs, was removed to a cottage nearer, where lived an old, kindly nurse, capable of taking care of him.

CHAPTER VI.

HALF - PAST three the day following the fire found Dorothy leaning over the bottom of Stewart's bed. She had come, in borrowed clothes, to ask how he was after his desperate heroism and severe burning, and, if words could be found, to thank him for what he had done for them all.

"You have nothing to thank me for," Paul said ; "it is I rather that ought to be grateful for the opportunity of being of some service to you."

Then he turned his face towards her and looked at her. There are three distinct and well-marked stages in the long look a man takes at the girl he loves. First a simple investigation and valuation of her features, to see if she is really as beautiful as he, in her absence, had pictured her ; then, finding she is, there follows a smile (of the eyes only) of satisfaction ; and then there wells up from the bottom of the eyes an infinite yearning, a "going out after" her. These stages may or may not follow each other rapidly, but they are always there. In Paul's case they were rapid, and in a few seconds he had run through them, and closed his eyes to shut in a picture of her framed in the golden dreams of yesternight that the fire spoilt. Her voice aroused him :

"Mr. Kennedy tells me you will be a long time ill. Do you dread the confinement much?"

"Not if the pain can be kept under, and—and—if you will come and see me sometimes."

"Of course I will come as often as you like; but I'll be but poor company for you. I'll tell you who there is that has heard of your heroism, and is most awfully anxious to come and see you. A man named Harry Moule. He's a near neighbour of ours, down for the vacation; a good fellow, at least I think him so, but most people think him rather mad."

"I don't mind that; all good men by some one or other have been thought mad. But what's he reading for?"

"Nothing, I believe; I mean for no profession. He has money. He seems to me to read only to feed his fads."

"We all do that, more or less; but tell me, please, what's his latest fad?"

"I hardly know, unless you can gather from this one remark that he made walking a little way down here with me. I asked him if he knew of any new book worth reading. He thought a moment, and then replied: 'Yes, I can put you on to something really good; it's not exactly new, but it's splendid! It's the Bible.' I have learned not to be astonished at anything he says, so I replied: 'But I have read it over and over again.'"

"And what did he say?"

"He frowned dreadfully, and then said, rather impatiently: 'Yes, yes, of course; but I don't mean

what you mean. I would advise you to read it properly for once, go straight for its beauties.' Then after a pause, and very much in earnest: 'By Jove! it's magnificent! And do you know, Miss Luxford,' he added, quite seriously, 'I believe I'm the first man that ever discovered it. I'll tell you how it happened. I took it up by mistake, and opened it, and then, seeing what I had done, I closed my eyes and tried to shut out the memory of those terrible days of my childhood when the day began with brimstone and treacle, and ended with a chapter. By the way,' he asked, 'have you tasted brimstone and treacle since you grew up?' When I assured him I had not, he continued, 'Nor I. *It* may not be so bad, you know. But what was I saying, Miss Luxford?' 'You had got to where you closed your eyes to shut out the memories of brimstone and——' 'Oh, yes,' he broke in, 'I know now. Well, when I opened my eyes again, they fell upon one of the Songs of Solomon. I read it again and again with constantly increasing pleasure, until old associations dropped entirely away and left it standing there a thing of beauty.' Then, as he constantly does, he changed the topic suddenly and asked again after you. By the time I had told him, we had reached the door and he wished me good-bye, but ran back for a moment and said: 'You'll read that book, won't you?' Now what do you think of him?"

"I like him awfully."

"But is he mad?"

"Yes, as Socrates, Diogenes, and—and—heaps of people are, from the world's point of vision."

"But I thought mad people were very objectionable, and Harry Moule is very nice."

"I think, Miss Luxford, you may take it as an axiom that mad people—I don't of course mean dangerous lunatics, but only those of whom the world says 'he's a nice fellow, you know, but a bit cracked'—well, these are for the most part men whom the gods love, men to whom they tell their secrets, men with antennæ reaching far into the future, and giving them more or less accurate ideas of its nature."

"I wish I were mad, then."

"You had better thank God you are not."

"Why, is it not nice to have antennæ?"

"No, it is better, anyhow as far as this world is concerned, to be in the world and of it, with all its happy brotherhoods and the warmth of friendships, than to live a solitary life and ultimately die a solitary death on some vague, mist-clad Nebo height of half knowledge."

"But must one necessarily travel these roads alone?" she asked, in all innocence of how deeply the question affected Paul.

"'Tis a terrible, terrible thing to say, Miss Luxford, but I fear one must. It is not given unto such men to marry." Then after a pause: "How many great souls have perished mutely and ingloriously in the maelstrom of domestic discord!"

"But why should such men ever marry? Why, I mean, are they not satisfied with their better heritage?"

"It may be that the fathers having eaten grapes the children's mouths water, or, what is far more probable,

amid their other yearnings there is one constant one for help and company. The gods are jealous, they will have the whole or none of you."

"Then must *no* good man marry?"

"Yes, an Anne Hathaway to fry flap-jacks! Did you ever read Froude's 'Carlyle'?"

"Yes; please don't mention it, I have not been well since. The Anti-vivisection Society ought to prosecute Froude. There is surely no salvation for the man who takes two people the world loves, and undresses and dissects them in the presence of a gaping crowd. But here comes Harry Moule; he is coming in."

In another second the door opened, and a young man of shy, nervous temperament got himself with much apparent difficulty into the room, and to the bedside. When Dorothy had introduced him, he jerked out his congratulation to Paul on his escape and his heroism; then he took a seat, and the next few moments were taken up in experimenting as to the best method of disposing of or hiding his hands and feet. Dorothy leaning over the bottom of the bed watched him amusedly for a few moments, and then heroically came to the rescue.

"I was telling Mr. Stewart that you had found a new book worth reading."

"A book, Miss Luxford?"

"Yes, did you not tell me just now that you had been reading the Bible?"

"Oh, yes!" then turning to Paul, "it's confounded clever, I assure you. I discovered it by accident, 'twas covered with dust—of course that was in its favour—in

a big library ; to go for the books with most dust on them is a very good rule. Have you read it ? ”

“ I have,” replied Stewart. “ I am in the same position as the German who said : ‘ I have read Paul’s works, and I louke them.’ ”

Moule shook his head sadly.

“ I don’t care much about your namesake, Mr. Stewart, he’s too heavy. You try the Psalms or Solomon. But perhaps I ought not to talk about the Bible, I know it’s bad form,” this with a glance at Dorothy.

“ Please don’t mind me, Mr. Moule, and I know Mr. Stewart likes it, and moreover, any conversation keeps him from thinking about his pain.”

“ Have you read Job lately, Mr. Stewart ? ”

“ I don’t think I have. I always thought there was too much of the—what shall I say ?—purely medicinal in it for my taste.”

“ You mean boils. Never mind those ; just read him when he was convalescent and well. He was an awful swell then, I assure you. His description of a war-horse, now—‘ Thou clothest his neck with thunder ! ’ Now, there’s a description for you—something ‘ deep-chested,’ organic, healthy, you know.”

Harry Moule had no thought now for the placing of his legs or the position of his hands ; he was growing interested, and consequently interesting.

“ I wanted some ferns the other day for my sister,” he continued, “ so I went to the village and found an old man who constantly visited a stream whose banks I thought likely to hold some. ‘ Ferns, zur ? what be they ? ’ he asked, with amazement. I tried to explain,

but it was no good. 'I only goes for the leeches,' he said, 'and there ain't many o' them!' I tried another man; he was equally ignorant. He went for firewood."

"And yet these people, whether they go for ferns, firewood, or leeches, love their Bibles. Don't you think they do, Mr. Stewart?"

Before Paul could answer, Moule broke in:

"Yes, Miss Luxford, as the dealer in leeches loves the trade that supports him; but it does not follow that his employment is an æsthetic one. No, you may always tell how far a man is fit to judge of a book by the parts of it he remembers. Now, these people who call themselves Christians only remember those parts that have some flavour of vengeance—'The wicked shall be turned into hell,' for instance—or those texts that promise them a good time hereafter. All they don't like they call metaphor. There is no language that lends itself so readily to contortion as the metaphorical methods of the ancients."

If Paul had been watching the face of Dorothy during this conversation, he would have been more interested in it, I think, than in the conversation itself.

Dorothy had been brought up in the faith of her forefathers. To her, every word of the Bible was inspired, as they understood the word, and these remarks of Moule's shocked and yet attracted her strangely. There was a grim earnestness in the speaker's manner that fixed her attention.

The deer-stalker when his game is wild sometimes mounts a red handkerchief on his walking-stick, and

then lying in wait allows the animal's own curiosity to bring it within range, and very interesting under these circumstances are the movements of the timid deer; and equally interesting and very similar were the mental movements of our heroine at this moment.

The conversation of the men fascinated her strangely, and yet she somehow felt that she had no right to be listening to it. Like her timid prototype, she would now creep cautiously but courageously into the field of danger, then suddenly some unusually shocking remark or unsuspected movement of the flag would frighten her back to the safety of her own woods. My analogy I think pretty; I know it is true. I have watched both these animals repeatedly, and in the case of the deer with such interest that I have forgotten to shoot him. My heroine was the kind of girl for whom the gods, I think, have much to answer. The solitary heroism of truth-finding should be left to men; girls should be blindfolded, they would be happier so and safer.

There had been a long pause, when Paul very sadly said:

"I quite agree with all you have said, but the difficulties that stand in the way of any change are immense, and the cruelties——"

"Yes," broke in Dorothy, "the cruelties. I quite agree with you, it would be a most unnatural and cruel thing to attempt to alter the opinions of people suddenly——"

"I don't think it would be unnatural. Nature, when she has any particular object to fulfil, never stops

to ask if the methods to be employed are cruel or not. The Master did not mince matters when He had to deal with error. Look, for instance, at His dealings with the Pharisees, who thought themselves quite as right as their prototypes think to-day. I was tempted into going to church the other day, and I must admit that I was never more interested. In the first place, in front of me there were the Ten Commandments. You know them, Miss Luxford? They were certain rules laid down for an undeveloped race with apparently immoral tendencies. They interested me tremendously as a memento of a time when the people had not risen to the level of doing good; nor, to judge from those commandments, were they expected to. Thou shalt do no harm—not murder, steal, etc.—you will notice is the tone of the whole of them; and yet, will you believe it, we, two thousand years after the advent of Christ, who swept the whole thing away with a newer and better law, all knelt down, and fervently asked the Almighty—not that we might keep them, but that we might be *inclined* to keep them! Was ever request more modest, Miss Luxford? If you were not here I should say ‘more absurd,’ because I really have no temptation to murder people. Then came the prayers, and I scarcely know in what words to tell you their influence upon me. The glorious wording of them, the whole-hearted harmony, the echo of another and a better age, carried me back to that better age.” And then, in an undertone, he added: “Would God I had lived then! An age, you know, Miss Luxford, when men, even the best of them, did believe in God, and worshipped Him as men should.”

"But surely, Mr. Moule, some men do now, don't they?"

"No, emphatically no! They write reviews on Robert Ellesmere, or translate Homer, if they have any spare time. Some, who should be infinitely great, spend their time in hunting for the infinitely little, and get for their pains a wry neck and a wry soul over the microscope. Some—but there, what's the use of going on? There's no living man that I know of, who could write these prayers that influenced me so deeply. Well, then came the sermon—but perhaps I am boring you?"

"Not a bit, please go on," exclaimed both his listeners in one voice.

"Well, the sermon, then, was preached by a man of some parts, a man who was not altogether a fool, I can assure you; but at the same time he was markedly out of place in attempting to lead men, in that he had never led himself, nor, for that matter, had he any idea of the course they should be led. He told us that he preached Christ crucified; but neither he nor they had, I think, any idea of the living Christ, which surely should be the first lesson taught, the friend of the friendless poor. Their only anxiety, he seemed to think (and I suppose he knew best), was to save their own wretched souls in the easiest way possible. I nearly jumped out of my seat with rage. 'Why on earth,' I wanted to say to him, 'don't you tell these people that if they want to know anything about Christ and Him crucified they must start at Bethlehem, work as He worked, and live as He lived, earnestly and silently—do their forty days in the wilderness, and then go forth to teach as He did?'

According to his teaching, one had only to come from the Stock Exchange in Jerusalem, stroll up to Golgotha, undergo some mystic change there, and one was all right. There was no 'living the life' in it. I came out from that church filled with infinite sadness, and as I strolled through the meadows home, I thought of that splendid line of Carlyle's, 'There is one word of God I know, for I have even seen His hand at the writing of it.' But I must go, I have bored you long enough." And with a few words of farewell, and a promise to see Paul Stewart again, he left them.

"Now, Miss Luxford," said Paul, when the door had closed, "do you still wish for antennæ?"

"Yes. No. I don't know. I wish he had stayed away."

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Harry Moule had left the room, Dorothy bowed her head upon her hands ; her elbows were resting upon the foot of the bed. She tried hard to collect her thoughts and make something definite out of what Moule had been saying. That there was a very great deal of truth in his remarks she had no doubt ; but the truths were horrible just in the same degree that they were real. A groan from the bed attracted her attention ; she looked up to find Paul's face the picture of increasing agony.

“ You are in great pain, Mr. Stewart ? ”

“ I am indeed, Miss Luxford.”

“ Is there anything I can do for you ? ”

“ Oh ! if only you could find Kennedy, he would relieve me.”

In a moment she had said good-bye, and was on her way homeward. She found Kennedy pacing up and down the garden, with his hands deep in his pockets, and a deep frown upon his face. He was angry, first with himself, then with Stewart, and lastly with Dorothy. Everything was going wrong with him. “ The dice of the gods *are* loaded,” he had been saying to himself. “ Why should this man save her and me, instead of its being

the other way about? By Jove! What clear sailing it would have been then! But now——” Then he had stopped suddenly, and taken a rapid estimate of his chance of securing Dorothy. As things stood now, the result was unfortunate.

“Why the deuce is it,” he asked himself, “that if two young people of different sex come together during an illness, the one as the nurse, the other as the nursed, there is no separating them? Turn on the tap of mutual sympathy and there is no stopping it. What a game chance has played for him! First, he saves her—that’s in off the red; then he saves the aunt—that’s another score; then he puts me down—that’s two more; and now, by Jove! he’s on the spot. He simply must win. Why, ’tis the largest break on record!”

The advent of Dorothy put a stop to this very irritating review of the aspect affairs had assumed.

“Oh, Mr. Kennedy, will you go and see the patient? Poor Mr. Stewart is suffering horribly. Mr. Moule has been there and over-tired him, I fear. I know you will stop his pain. Oh, please hurry.”

“Just as I thought,” said Kennedy to himself, as he ran upstairs for his implements of warfare. “He’s on the spot, and will very likely finish off the game. Propose from his pillow! He’ll be a fool if he does; ’tis during convalescence a man is irresistible, when he can just totter along on the girl’s arm, allow her to spread his rug for him, and then slowly settle himself thereon. I suppose to be quits with him now I’d have to break my leg—both legs.”

Kennedy walked straight into Paul's room, and found him, as Dorothy had said, in the agony of pain that these men—and these men alone—can suffer. He had some one else's nervous system. The principle upon which men's organs are selected and fitted together is a very curious one; they seem like Waltham watches, to be put together on the principle that any part will fit any place if only its name is right. Legs, arms, and necks are simply legs, arms, and necks; they may be long or short, thick or thin; no matter, they are handed out. Hence the strange incongruities one constantly meets with, men built as though of remnants. Here's a little man with a big heart—he gets apoplexy; a big man with a little heart comes next—he suffers from everlasting depression; some are all brain and no body; others, and I fear they predominate, are the very reverse. I have two men staying with me now; the one has a large liver from which he groans to me tales of its tyranny; the other should put a knife to his throat, for he has a large appetite. I always ask these men to meet, because they fit in with the evening well. The man led by the stomach is in splendid form directly after dinner; under the influence of a glad satiety, he is most entertaining; while he of the liver lies on the sofa and groans. But the memory of the meal fades at the same pace in both, only with this difference of result—as one dies out the other wakes up!

But Paul Stewart is suffering the agonies that only such a man can suffer, and, as I said, almost before Angus could close the door, he groaned out, "For Heaven's sake, do something for me!"

"All right, my dear fellow, bear it for one moment longer, and that shall be the last."

Then he took from his pocket a small leathern case, and opening it, removed a little syringe and a hollow needle, and—but there—who does not know the look of this modern and mighty implement of warfare against the ills that flesh is heir to?

"Happiness can now be bought for one penny, and carried in the waistcoat pocket," muttered Angus, as he drew up from the phial the mystic fluid that was to metamorphose his friend.

"Now lend me one of your arms, old fellow. I won't hurt you. Just a prick, and nothing more."

The operation was a very small one, but the results were beyond all describing, for with that prick came peace, infinite and all-pervading. Paul closed shis eye and lay back on his bed, then tried to trace the movement of this god in liquid form that was rushing down every nerve and driving the enemy before him. 'Twas a strange sensation, impossible to describe, impossible to forget.

"How many drops did you inject?" he asked of Angus.

"Ten. Why?"

"Only ten drops! Will you believe it, those ten drops have already taken entire possession of me—not soothed the pain only, but driven it from the field, and substituted a sense of delicious warmth, and bathed me in a flood of delight? Angus, old man," he said, stretching his hand out to him, "I have always despised your art; I have always said that, since it ceased to be

mysterious, it ceased to be interesting ; but, tell me, can you explain this miraculous influence of your ten drops, that have converted me from a tortured fiend into an angel at rest ? ”

“ Shall I be candid with you ? ”

“ Please do.”

“ Then I must admit that neither I nor any one else understands it. The stuff I gave you is known as morphia, which is the soul, the active principle, of opium ; and opium has been called God’s gift to man ; but when He gave it to us, He certainly withheld instructions as to its use. The consequence is that we throw it about promiscuously, with the result that some are taken to heaven by it, and others to hell. Some it makes sleep, and some it keeps awake ; some it stupefies, and some it ennobles ; but the unfortunate part of the whole thing is that those to whom it is of service ought not to have it, lest its use become a habit with them ; and those to whom it is not harmful don’t want it, so that it’s not altogether an unmixed blessing. But, good-bye ! You’ll get a sleep now, probably.”

CHAPTER VIII.

BUT Paul Stewart did not sleep. The inconstant god, Morphia, does the best he can for a man when first introduced. If he has no brains, he lets him sleep ; if he has brains, he keeps him awake and happy with harmonies that are played on nerve-fibres.

Paul Stewart belonged to the latter order. He had brains, and brains filled with a store of memories as miscellaneous as the stock of a curio vendor ; and all these, when once the pain was vanquished, the mystic ten drops unpacked and showed to him. They did more than that, they added to the beauty of these memories ; and, as Paul lay there, and let old lines, that before were commonplace, but now rhythmical and beautiful, run through his brain, he experienced a time of quiet, passive ecstasy quite new to him.

There were, during this time, three lines that constantly repeated themselves. "Twas this, from Longfellow :

" And the cares that infest the day
Shall fold up their tents like the Arabs,
And silently steal away."

He had always thought them beautiful, but now they were intense and real. No longer a rhythmical arrange-

ment of words only, but an actual picture ; nay, a thing of life in which the beings moved, the tents were folded, and the procession started, and silently the scene was deserted. Paul saw the Arabs leave as distinctly as did the birds, watching in neighbouring trees, and waiting for the broken food.

But the morphia went further back than this, and unfolded memories of his boyhood. Little love scenes, old skating days and shooting expeditions were seen as vividly and enjoyed as heartily as though they happened but yesterday. Nor was there a tinge of sorrow or satiety about these memories ; they were bathed in the rosy dawn of unalloyed happiness. Truly miracles are cheap enough.

Here is a man who but an hour since was in a deeper well of agony than Dante could describe, or Doré depict ; but who now has been lifted into a realm of delight that is to him real and earnest. And lifted by what ? By an almost invisible crystalline particle, distilled from the breast of our mother earth by the common poppy.

His poor burnt limbs, too, lay now quiet and painless, and as though far away from him. This last, this feeling of distance between mind and body, was very marked and wonderful.

“ Would my mind be always clear and intense like this, if only I could permanently crucify the flesh ? ” Paul asked himself. “ And can this be what the apostle means ? ”

Then Paul slowly and imperceptibly passed into the realm of sleep ; sleep—not the “ anarchy of dreaming

sleep," but rather a state of conscious unconsciousness ; a realm of passive delight, where he acted not nor was acted upon, but where he stood aside as it were and let the world explain itself. And the world did explain itself. All the hitherto mysterious aspects of "this fever called living," were now transparent enough, and he smiled as he thought of the hours he had wasted in fretting and fuming over them.

The dreams of the un-opiumed brain are mostly absurd, and never trustworthy. The ordinary dreamer climbs giddy heights only to come down with a rush, or explores hideous depths to find some gaunt absurdity. Under the influences of the drug, during its very earliest exhibition, they are the exact reverse. Paul's dreams, as I have said, were not shocking, but consistent and real. Time and space were annihilated, all was in the present, and all before him. "The dance of plastic circumstance" unravelled itself, and for the first time he saw why he was and what he was. No words could convey the revelation made clear to him, and for the simple reason that the revelation was made to a part of him to which the ordinary senses of men are in no way related.

"Oh that I could tell you all I saw!" he was wont to say in after days ; "but it is impossible. One, and one picture only, remains at all clear to me ; and it's a sin to try and describe that even now, in the mediocrity of every-day living."

But the picture was so dear to him that he always made the effort. He would tell how he stood on some high pinnacle, and, with the whole human race

before him—marching past, as it were—looked down through the long æons of the past, tracing the well-beaten, blood-stained, circuitous route men had come. And then there dawned on him a saddening realisation of how terrible the struggle had been; and, as he looked, he recognised, every here and there, monuments of great epochs. Far away, in the dim distance, was cloud-capped Sinai; then Nebo, Buddha, Mahomet; then Calvary, Mecca, and near it the ruins of Ancient Rome; and, close up, Rome again. In the very front of him he saw a surpliced crowd of serious gentlemen, building even another memento of what has been done, and, pressing forward, a few courageous path-finders.

What astonished Paul most was that from this crowd of workers no sound arose. In other states all had been a Babel to him; a hideous, discordant babbling of tongues.

“And the thing that struck me very forcibly,” Paul would add, “was that along the tedious route that men had come lay broken fragments of shattered gods.”

But he saw now, for the first time, that these gods had been purposeful; they had grown gradually more and more beautiful and had consequently been instrumental in leading men beauty-wards.

So Paul slept on and dreamed on. As the opium lost its influence the dreams became less ethereal and more of the earth, earthy.

The charming Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table tells us that there are in every person three persons: “John as he sees himself; John as his friends see him; and John as he is—as God sees him.”

How much farther might not the Autocrat have gone?

He might have multiplied John by the number of drugs that could be given to him. I recommend this experiment to any of our physiologists who lie without the range of the Anti-vivisection Society. They might begin with opium and end with blue pill.

At eight o'clock Paul woke, and with the waking came no memories of the night—they dawned later—but a sense of great weariness, of utter exhaustion, and the rumblings of distant pains grew nearer and nearer.

Although he remembered nothing of the night, it had left its influence upon him, and that influence contrasted most horribly with the present. Have you danced all night, reader, in the bright atmosphere of hospitality, and bathed yourself all night in the heart-bred smiles of the girl you love, and then, in the cold, brutal dawn of the morning, had to fight your own way homeward against wind and snow? If you have, you will understand something of Paul's feelings, as he sat up in bed and wondered if, after what he had gone through, life could ever be worth the living. "It can never again be the best possible," he thought. "It must always be a contrast with what ten drops of that stuff yonder could buy for me."

"I suppose the gods were right," he said, aloud, "to fix man to the rock of his destiny by so short a chain—five links only—the five links of our stupid senses. The music of the spheres would have unfitted us, I suppose, for the discords of every-day life. . . ."

Half-past nine brought Angus.

"Well, Stewart, I suppose you have had a strange night; was it heaven or the other place?"

"Not the other place, certainly."

"Well," said Kennedy, sitting himself down on Paul's bed, "you might tell me something about it."

Stewart shook his head sadly. "It is impossible, I assure you, Kennedy. In the first place I am too miserable, in the second place the memory of the whole thing is too hazy."

"Well, I won't bother you now," said Kennedy; "you are certain to tell me some time. What I came in for was to tell you the arrangement for the day. I propose to come in in an hour, dress your wounds, and get you up; then to take you, in a bath-chair I have borrowed, down to the tennis-court, where a match is being played. Miss Luxford and I will look after you, and you can act the interesting invalid, you know."

"My dear fellow, it's out of the question. I'm too awfully seedy, and I'm getting worse every minute; in another, I shan't be fit company for man or beast, let alone Miss Luxford and yourself."

But a promise on the part of Angus that, if necessary, he should have another injection, overcame all his difficulties. "And so it came to pass." The author is in love with this expression, and intends to use it often; it assists himself and the reader over many dry details. It came to pass, then, that at a quarter to two our hero—for I have made up my mind to take Paul Stewart for my hero, on the distinct understanding that a hero need not necessarily be heroic—found himself on the tennis-ground, and on the first step of the second ascent—or descent, which you will—dreamwards.

CHAPTER IX.

"Now, isn't this worth coming to see, Miss Luxford?" Angus asked, as he ran out for a moment from among the players. He was all aglow with excitement; the game had been fast and furious.

"It is splendid!" Dorothy replied. "I do hope you'll win!" she said louder, as Angus went back to join his side.

She was sitting on a seat beside Stewart, and devoting half her attention to the game and half to his wants. But his wants were few, for he was under the influence of his second dose of opium. This was his first during waking hours, and the effects were strikingly different. He was away from the world, as he had been last night—no longer a part of it; but the world was the world peopled with people he knew, and acting as they had always acted. The difference was all in himself now, not in his surroundings.

"Do you mean it when you say you like this sort of thing, Miss Luxford?" asked Moule, who was sitting on the other side of Stewart.

"Of course I do. Why shouldn't I?"

"I don't know that you shouldn't, only it seems rather a waste of energy. Do you know how a Frenchman described fox-hunting?"

Dorothy shook her head.

"He called it riding violently after a nasty smell. Would you like to see a bull-fight, Miss Luxford?"

"I like to see anything," she replied, with more warmth than she had ever shown in his presence, "that brings out a man's manhood, his pluck, and his love of winning. Don't you, Mr. Moule?"

"If I am candid, I must say I do not."

"Well, what do you like, then?"

"I like to sit still and see the world wag without the discomfort and exertion of wagging myself. What do you say, Stewart? A box for us in the world's theatre, when, for our amusement, the players play, the ladies dress, the pit cheers, and the gallery screams; but we will sit with Teufelsdröckh alone in the stars, eh, old man?"

"No, thanks," replied Stewart, "it is too cold up there for my liking. I agree with Miss Luxford in preferring this sort of thing, where one gets some of the warmth of sympathetic fellowship if one does not play."

"And you don't call that sort of thing a waste of energy?"

"Not if it helps to produce a good healthy man. You must excuse me, Moule, but I do think you children of light are entirely out of it in despising the body and its purely Philistine pleasures as you do. The most you men can hope for is to produce another Shelley to flap his ineffectual wings."

"That would be better than another Tom Sayers or champion lawn-tennis player."

"I agree with you, neither would be in the right

direction ; but another Tom Sayers would be by far the best for the race. It seems to me in that, at any rate, his manhood was wholesome and healthy ; there was some foundation to work upon, and you can't have a really great man of the highest order without this foundation."

"Let me see," said Moule, "was Darwin robust? Did Carlyle have dyspepsia? Was Newton big physically?"

"But," replied Stewart, "these were not men of the highest order, in that they were not representative ; they were ' throwings forward ' of Nature, just as stock-breeders and others tell of her throwing back."

"It is rather rot, you know, to suppose those fellows racing about in that absurd way are consciously striving for a healthy manhood."

"I did not say consciously. In all good work one is conscious of the product only, not of the methods employed for its production. You are not conscious of the movements of your fingers when you are playing the ' Moonlight Sonata,' are you, Miss Luxford?"

"Indeed, no," replied Dorothy, "I am barely conscious of the result. The effect of music is upon some sense that has no name yet—but will you tell me, Mr. Moule, is there anything you do like very much?"

"You see that man just come in at the gate, Miss Luxford? Well, I like him awfully, for the simple reason that he is always so delightfully miserable, so cynical ; and then he's antithetical, that is to say, he looks at everything from a different point of view to everybody else. I know no better fun than leading him round like a big mastiff among people with pet

theories of their own, and occasionally unchaining him, and letting him make mincemeat of them."

"What a brute he must be!"

"On the contrary, he is most gentle; he puts them on the operating table in the most suave manner, and then with perfect art removes limb from limb. But I think he's looking for me; if you'll excuse me I'll go and commence operations."

"Please don't bring him this way, Mr. Moule, unless he's really safely muzzled."

When Moule had gone, Dorothy turned to Stewart.

"You are quite free from pain now, aren't you, Mr. Stewart?"

"Yes, thanks, perfectly. I wonder if it is fair to ask if you like Mr. Moule?"

"I do and I don't. Sometimes he shocks me terribly, and at others attracts me irresistibly. I would be sorry for him to fall in love with a friend of mine."

"Why?"

"Because he would show her only the irresistible side before marriage, and possibly the other after. But there, one need not fear; he will never marry, I suppose."

"I don't know that," said Stewart, after a pause. "You never know the sort of man any grown woman will choose. At one time, the prettiest woman chose the bravest knight; nowadays she trusts to blind instinct, and in after years wonders at domestic discord. Mind you, Miss Luxford, I am not despising blind instinct, 'tis about the most trustworthy thing I know. It guards the cattle from poisonous herbs, it

guides the rootlets of trees to watercourses, it tells us when to eat, drink, or sleep; but there's no question about it—it does not tell us whom we ought to marry.”

“What, would you advise young people, then, to trust to their better judgment?”

“No; that, too, is no good, in fact, there is nothing to trust; it seems to me that we live in a very awkward age. We are endeavouring to put our impulses into harness, and our judgment on the box-seat, while as yet the driver can't drive, nor are the horses broken in.”

“The problem *is* a very difficult one.”

“It is difficult.”

The serious tones of this young couple as they sat there on the verge of their destiny, told that they were conscious of their dangerous position. Modern novelists make a great mistake in supposing that all young people are drawn by such small details as the shape of a nose, the turn of an eye, into the everlasting heaven or hell of matrimony, and modern physiologists are equally wrong in pronouncing the motive power entirely earth-born; nor does Heaven interfere. There are a few, a very few among men and women, who—seeing something of the risks, the responsibilities, and the capabilities for good or ill of married life—keep the reckless, irresponsible thing called “Love” under the strictest governance. I need scarcely say that position and wealth are very secondary matters with them. He, not in so many words, but in thought is saying to her: “I am but half a man without a wife, no man at all with a bad one; but with the help of a good one, I can reach the goal I have set myself. I wonder, could you be that good one?”

And she, poor child—with aspirations as real to her as his are to him, if less defined ; with the still, small voice of the “Time Spirit ” that has at length overtaken women, whispering to her of her capacities for better things than mere motherhood, or the empty mockeries that society offers, if only some hand will help, some mind lead, while some heart loves—wonders if he could be that brave one.

So far so good ; but now that irresponsible thing called “Love ” has—“while their hands wandered ”—got loose, and, sneaking up from behind, deliberately knocks them down the precipice over which they have been swinging their legs.

But there's a good deal of method in Love's madness. Some are suddenly pushed down the precipice ; others led down through by-paths, amid roses, the pricks of whose thorns are not felt ; or, as in this case, through beds of poppies, the curse of whose alkaloid is as yet unknown.

CHAPTER X.

THE tennis match was over. Kennedy's side had won, and the village team was glad. Paul Stewart and Dorothy did not stay to see it out, but with the help of a boy he was wheeled into a neighbouring coppice where there was no discordant element to impede their conversation. We will join them presently, for their conversation led to great results.

In the meantime we will go with Moule and Kennedy into the morning-room of the Rectory.

Kennedy had bathed and changed. They had both lighted a cigar, and were silently smoking at the open window. Kennedy was infinitely miserable. Dorothy had never looked so lovely and lovable as to-day, and he had never loved her so madly. The glances of admiration thrown at her by the players, the almost reverential attention of the few who were privileged to know her, and the immense opportunities of the invalid had all combined against his sanity. 'Twas now, if ever, he felt that he needed a friend—some—well, it did not matter—some man or woman to lean on, some one who would sympathise with him and unravel for him all the terrible tangle of sensations that go to the making of love-mania.

Is there, I must pause to ask you, any fool like the

man in love? In his saner moments he may be an astronomer, and able to weigh the planets in a balance and find them wanting; he may be a scientist, and able to talk flippantly of "pangeneses"; he may be anything staid and worshipful but once let him get under the dominion of a woman's eye, and until the fit is over, there is no hope for him. One of the most constant symptoms of this insanity is an irresistible craving for some one to confide in. An oak-tree is better than nothing. The intense interest in one's own sensations compensates for the absence of it in the listener.

Kennedy felt this craving, and although Moule's cynicism rendered him anything but a desirable confidant, he was the only one available. Any difficulty of leading the conversation into the right channel was removed by Moule himself saying :

"Your friend's wings will get as much singed as his feet, I fancy, before he recovers; and perhaps the wings will be the hardest to cure."

"What do you mean?"

"Mean! I mean, put two people of different sex under such conditions as those we saw to-day—the nurse and the nursed—and you know what follows. That, to my mind, is one of the most damnable things about being ill."

"Why damnable? I would not mind being ill—and very bad, too—to be nursed by her."

"What, are you hit, too?"

"Yes; and badly hit. I don't mind telling you, because you might suggest something. I'm in a hole, and you, as an outsider, might help me out of it.

You must know that Stewart and I have both been terribly in love with Miss Luxford, from the day we came down here ; but then the difference in our prospects put me, I thought, in the position of first favourite. He, without money or a profession, could not possibly have proposed to her, and I, with all the running in my own hands, neglected my opportunities. Then came this brutal fire, that, by making him at once a hero and an invalid, put all the trumps in his hand ; do you understand ?”

“I do, thoroughly, and if you’ll let me, I’ll advise you what to do.”

“Let you ! I’d be awfully obliged.”

“Well, go away then for change of air ; get some salmon-fishing, decent snipe-shooting——”

“Excuse me, Moule,” broke in Kennedy, with some warmth, “that’s impossible. We’re not made of that stuff. I mean that——”

“You mean that you come of a race that by way of pastime rescues ladies’ gloves from lions’ dens, etc., is that it ?”

“Something like it. Have you no sympathy with that sort of thing ?”

“If, by sympathy, you mean fellow-feeling, then I have none ; but if you mean admiration, then I have a good deal. I admire a war correspondent, but I am not going to leave my own spring mattress. In a certain way, I admire the man who shoots Niagara in a beer-barrel, but I don’t risk my own neck. No ; you must not think me a brute, Kennedy, if I speak warmly. I feel warmly, I tell you, when I remember the number of

good friends I have lost through this brutal thing called Love. He seems to me to mesmerise people, and teach them sleep-walking ; takes them by the nose, and whispering all sorts of lies in their ears, leads them to the brink of the maelstrom of domestic humdrumness, and then kicks them over. When the dream is done, the poor devil wakes up to find that the little game was simply to keep the species intact."

Moule had risen from his chair and paced the room during the latter part of his tirade, and as he wound up, he stopped in front of Kennedy, who, looking up with an expression full of pity—this pity is another symptom of love-mania—asked :

"Has the thought never occurred to you that, with such a majority against you, it is just possible it is yourself that is out of harmony with things natural?"

"Those horses we saw just now carting road-metal probably thought the thorough-bred that watched them over the hedge out of harmony with things natural, as you call it ; but the racer had the best of it, although in a minority. And if you had reasoned with these same cart-horses, and pointed out the difference between crushed oats and a purely grass diet, hard work and gentle exercise, they might have shaken their wise old heads at you, as many a married man has at me, and ground out : ' Ah ! but, you see, "life is not an indulgence, but a process." ' Rot, utter rot ! Life is just what you like to make it ; bondage is bondage, whether you are tied up with olive-branches or chain-traces."

A pregnant silence followed this outbreak of Moule's, broken at last by Kennedy's saying :

"If I were going to support the universal tendency to fall in love from a philosophical standpoint, I should say that, being universal, it must be right, and naturally right."

"There is a universal tendency among women to have children, and among the sons of men to die ; but both processes are none the less painful or inartistic."

"But you will grant that both are necessary?"

"Quite so, and there of course the analogy falls through, because to be married is not necessary. Nature does not break one in to carting road-metal unless one chooses ; 'tis quite optional. You can trot along by the side of the team if you like, and see the other beggars pull. No ; seriously, Kennedy, I have thought this matter out as well as I can, and I am distinctly of opinion that the duty of all nature—including all women, and 9,999 out of every 10,000 men—is to conform to their environments, and they are capable of no better destiny, and made for the purpose. And among their environments I include all those instincts that are, and many that are not, absolutely essential to life. But unto the odd one it is given to lick Nature into shape ; to drive instead of being driven. It is the greatest mistake in the world to suppose that Nature is aiming at your happiness. She, of course, puts a nosebag on you occasionally, but only with the idea of getting more work out of you. I have an instinct that periodically tells me to eat, but I don't, as some of the carnivora do, eat all I could. I avoid the sad satiety of the well-fed boar and the 'strong farmer.' I have a tendency to drink, but I don't get drunk and

go back to a purely vegetable life, and lie in the gutter. I have a tendency to sleep, but I don't hibernate, especially if there is skating to be had. I also, I admit, have a tendency to be married, but I avoid the switch-back matrimony. I assure you, I have looked at the thing from every point of view, and I don't like it, neither its ups nor its downs. I don't say it conceitedly, but I much prefer being the showman to the animal caged."

"I did not look for much sympathy from you, but I certainly did not expect this sledge-hammer kind of criticism of the whole business. If this tendency to fall in love is such a mistake and such an universal mistake, how is it to be overcome?"

"By a diversion of nerve-currents. Men with big brains will presently have small families, and *vice versâ*. Why, bless you, the thing is capable of scientific demonstration! But there, it is no use arguing about the matter! If you are determined to go in for this form of suicide, nothing will stop you, and therefore, I suppose, the best thing to do would be to help you if I can—that is, hand you down the prussic acid, if I can reach it. Now, old man, in the language of the linendraper, what can I do for you?"

Kennedy rose from his chair, and walking to the window, stood silently for some moments. Then, without turning, said:

"Nothing, thanks. Come, let's go and look at the dogs."

"All right," replied Moule; "we will go to the dogs."

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN one comes to think of it, there is not much credit due to the man who wins a girl's love when all the forces of Nature, animate and inanimate, lend their omnipotent help. These same forces are simply so many hands keeping you in the centre of the stream, on the surface of which you must—unless you sink altogether—drift into the sea of matrimony. The end may be either, as Moule thought, a Vauxhall, or, as Kennedy believed, a Paradise ; the forces are still irresistible and the destiny the same.

I have watched many young men and maidens making for matrimony. I have wandered that way myself, first through a metaphorical bed of roses, and for the last hundred yards over literal wild flowers scattered by the hands of children from the village school ; but never have I known surroundings so literally omnipotent as these that, on this summer evening, surrounded Paul Stewart and Dorothy Luxford. In the first place—that is *my* first place, for I am not going to paint the mossy bank on which Dorothy sat, the bluebells nestling round her, nor the pines above, that in the gentle breeze bent their heads curiously to get a peep at her through the dense

undergrowth, all this sort of thing is commonplace, and my people are not commonplace, however badly I may paint them—in the first place, then, there was no intention on the part of either of them to talk of love, any more than there is effort on the part of the skylark, when he pants forth his flood of rapture so divine, to be musical.

When the great Browning first met the late and great Mrs. Browning, I have no doubt their one idea was to talk poetry. The natural outcome—all happiness for them and all profit for us—the “grow old along with me,” was essentially an afterthought. To make love studiously is to make love badly; the man becomes artificial, the girl on her guard. You can’t walk naturally nor breathe regularly if you try to govern the processes by the thing you call intellect; nor can you preside over your heart’s action. The hearts of a man and woman are like two convolvuli—leave them alone, and they will entwine naturally.

The rules are universal. There may, of course, be circumstances that in particular instances modify or intensify the truth of them. In the case immediately under our consideration—to use the language of the Bench—there was one all-powerful ingredient that must not be forgotten: Paul Stewart was under the influence of morphia, and morphia, as I think I said before, kills one half—the lower half—of a man. It crucifies the flesh; it strains off the purely animal, and leaves a residue of hopes, dreams, and aspirations that are essentially super-human. De Quincey has told us of the marvellous influence music had upon him when he—

preparatory to a visit to the opera—took his dose of opium. But De Quincey knew but little of opium as we moderns know it. He was too well balanced mentally to find either the highest heaven or the lowest hell of it. Paul Stewart was just the man to find both.

“I am so glad you consented to my being wheeled here, Miss Luxford, and consented to coming with me, regardless of chaperones. I was intensely anxious to be alone—alone with you, I mean—not to talk rubbish, you know, as most men would wish to, but because, running all through my veins this afternoon, there is an intoxicating appreciation of things beautiful. Just look at those clouds! By Jove! I know now how Shelley felt when he wrote that poem of his.”

There was a moment's silence, then Dorothy said :

“I wonder how it is that men like Shelley and Byron were—although saturated with such a sense of the beautiful—so objectionable in their home lives?”

“I don't think they were responsible to ordinary laws, Miss Luxford. They were not ‘under the law’; they were essentially a law unto themselves. The greatest sin Shelley could have committed, it seems to me, would have been to have committed spiritual suicide by sticking to a woman who was unappreciative. The sin (if there was any) lay with Mary Godwin in undertaking duties she was absolutely incapable of performing. There is somewhere given by Holmes a very instructive and interesting picture of Shakespeare writing Hamlet's soliloquy when Anne Hathaway opens the door and asks if he will have venison for dinner or flap-jacks. After a good deal of effort, he induces her

to decide the momentous question for him, and, for half an hour after she has closed the door, he, with his head buried in his hands, and with the emphasis first on one word and then on the other, asks himself again and again, in all earnestness, which would be the noblest in the mind of man—to have flap-jacks or venison? This is just the sort of thing that would, if continued, have killed Shelley. Think of this; Shelley (in an ecstasy of delight)—

The triumphal arch through which I march,
With hurricane, fire, and snow.

“Mary Shelley, *née* Godwin, opens the door. ‘Percy, darling, here’s a letter from papa, asking for the loan of ten pounds for a day or two.’”

“Men ought really to be given flags — danger signals to run up so as to warn people of the state of their inner man. If I married a poet I would have a study built for him in the garden, with a flagstaff rising out of the centre of it; then when he was off to the realms of fancy he could mount the ‘Blue Peter’; when he was heroically wrestling with a rhyme he could run up a red flag, and when he had found his rhyme and wanted me to rave over it, he could haul down the ‘Danger’ signal, and mount the signal to speak. Really, marrying a genius is very like nursing a porcupine.”

“But you see, Miss Luxford, we look at things from such a totally different point of view. I look upon Mary Godwin, Westminster Bridge or no Westminster Bridge, as the most fortunate woman that ever lived. To have lived with Shelley, to have walked and talked

with him, to have received his confidence and listened to his aspirations, to have been his wife—and you remember what the Prayer Book says : ‘and they two shall be one flesh’—was a destiny that the noblest woman might aspire to. And her end, after all, was not so shocking as it appears at first sight ; the contrast between what had been and what was, made life very undesirable. If she had any appreciation at all, the measure of happiness meted out to her was far greater than that given to most women.”

“The whole thing,” said Dorothy, “appears to me in the light of one of the greatest tragedies the world has ever seen. Probably every girl of any worth is conscious of a yearning to be of help to such men as Shelley. There is a good deal of the maternal instinct and hero-worship in the hearts of all of us. ‘If I had only been Mary Godwin,’ we say, ‘I would have borne with all his eccentricities’ ; and yet, every woman I have read of who has had the privilege has neglected it, or was unaware of it. I wonder why it is ? Whose fault is it, the man’s or the woman’s ?”

“The fault of both. No man is quite a hero to his own wife. He may have lost his appetite in writing a chapter or a poem before breakfast that will gladden the hearts and brighten the lives of hundreds of thousands ; but let him once neglect to eat his breakfast when it does come, and there will be a squabble that will knock all the poetry out of him for days to come. It is his fault, too, because he stupidly dreams every woman possible of rendering the extravagant appreciation of his efforts that is the breath of his nostrils.”

"And how is it to be cured? Is it to go on to the end of the chapter?"

"I fear so. There is only one remedy, so far as I can see."

"And that?"

"Well, Miss Luxford, it is difficult to explain to you; and it is impossible of execution, because the world will never see the necessity of it. Mr. Edison should, I think, be invited to invent a neurometer, a measurer of nerve-currents, and on this basis, on the volume of a man's nerve-currents, his sins should be estimated. These men are all men of gigantic passions. With them it is always flood time or drought. Look at Byron, at one time plotting for the ruin of a helpless woman, at another, for the freedom of an oppressed people; now intensely vindictive and unpardonably cruel, then saturated with a pure and holy religion, with the mountains for his altars. No, these great souls should be let alone, especially by their wives. It is a misfortune their wives cannot be chosen for them by the State and endowed, as an encouragement to genius."

But as Stewart's morphia was rapidly going, and with it his life and energy, he asked that he might be wheeled home.

CHAPTER XII.

THREE months have gone, and these three months have been, for three out of the four people who are to accompany us through these wandering pages, pregnant of fate.

We have selected Paul Stewart as our hero, on the distinct understanding he need not necessarily be heroic. Let us deal with him first. He is still at the cottage, better in health, able to get about, but a confirmed taker of morphia.

I must pause to ask you (critics notwithstanding) to be prepared at the outset to be very lenient with this man. The irresponsibility that a certain school of thinkers would claim for the whole of us was his by especial birthright. He belonged to the ever-increasing order of neurotics, an order that has produced the whole of the genius of the world, nine-tenths of our lunatics, half our drunkards, the poets and the Salvation Army ; men upon whose nerve-fibre, screwed up by heredity, every passing wind of circumstance plays the tune that best pleases it. If their neurosis be poetical, they are loved of women ; if alcoholic, they are admonished by police magistrates ; if religious, they are worshipped by old maids. The only good of the whole tribe is to supply the world with its Hamlets, and psychologists of the Maudsley order with an occupation.

The blessed balance of a mediocre life that keeps the

world sane is no part of their heritage. They are the children of extremes, at one moment crushed by Nature's obvious cruelty, and at the next making audible her efforts to be beautiful and harmonic.

Paul Stewart belonged essentially to this order of men. He had wandered hitherto through the world and found without him all peace and restful effort, and within him only an infinite pining for what was not.

"Why," he used to say, "should all the earth and all the heavens be in order? Why should the planets fulfil their spheres, and the earth her seasons? Why should everything have peace and quietude but me?" And then he would throw himself on the nearest bank and cry as women will.

This was the boy who found in opium his infinite solace. Why, I know not. Let the doctors, who have been aptly described by Voltaire as men who put a drug of which they know nothing into a body of which they know less, explain for me.

His pain had long since left him, but had found for him his destiny (the mission of pain to most of us). "The Everlasting Nay" precedes "the Everlasting Yea;" the road to Calvary lies through Gethsemane. But although Paul's pain was gone, the habit of taking opium, or rather morphia, had full possession of him. At this time the habit was getting to the end of its glorious infancy. The small doses that in the earlier days are sufficient to produce the effect he pined for were not succeeded by the depression that follows the larger quantities that become necessary in after years.

"Life," says Sir Cornwall Lewis, "is not happy, but it is very interesting."

With Paul Stewart during these three months life had been both happy and interesting. Old discords had died out, old joys become intensified, life made real and earnest. The pale cast of thought had, by the mystic drug, been removed, and in its place a new halo of intensity hung about the earth as a garment. The effect upon him was felt by all about him. Dorothy in her daily walks had shared it. Her woman's sense of the beautiful had grown, her hereditary religious tenets gave way to a newer religion of love, and law, and beauty. She had been lifted out of herself, which, when men are concerned, means very much, but with women more.

The old question which she was asking herself when first introduced to us had been decided in favour of Paul Stewart; not in so many words, but his love of things beautiful, and the educating influence of the man, had become essential to her. His every analogy had been food for after-thought; a new door, leading into a region of ecstasy, had been opened for her.

No word of love had as yet been spoken between them; no bond sealed, or promise passed; but a mutual feeling of dependence upon each other held them together in the firmest union. He, in common with all men of that order, needed some one in whom to confide; and she, poor girl—a heroine among the new order of women—some one to whom she could look for guidance.

The conversations of these young people, at this time, are not worth recording. If you have not taken opium they would be past your understanding; if you have—commonplace. Suffice it to say, they were full of poetry and a new religion.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I LOVE you. I love you desperately, and that should be sufficient."

"But others may love me."

"Ah, that's just it! That's the whole story. I knew it from the beginning. You, woman-like, would rather entrust your life into the hands of this dreamer—this diseased and drugged impossibility—than to my wholesome manhood. I don't rave to you of stars and flowers; I don't prate of Shelley and clouds; I offer to love and to live for you; and what," he asked, as he stepped from the dusty road—up and down which in his excitement he had been pacing—to the fence over which Dorothy was half-leaning (these were the uncongenial surroundings this man of practicality had selected as their meeting-place), "what has he to give that will—even from a woman's point of view—compare with it?"

"Mr. Kennedy, you must not speak like this to me. Mr. Stewart has given me hopes and aspirations. He——"

"Hopes and aspirations! And what good will they ever be to you, I'd like to know? We—you and I—have our lives to live——"

"Yes, lives he saved for us."

"But that is no reason why we should not live them well—do our duty. We have difficulties to overcome. Are aspirations and hopes the capital to start this business upon?"

"But he is your friend!"

"And so are you. It is not alone that I want you for myself. I'll be candid with you. I do want you for myself, but I want also to save you from this man Stewart and his impracticable love. He has some knowledge of poetry; I know some facts. He has read his Tennyson; I have only read my Spenser and Maudsley. I would, God knows, say nothing cruel and harsh, were it not that the happiness of the whole three of us is in the balance."

"But, excuse me, Mr. Kennedy, I don't know what facts you have to go upon. I know this: I am a nobler and better woman since I knew Mr. Stewart. You have been candid with me, I will be candid with you. Although no word of love has yet passed between us, I do love him, and I ought to. He has lifted me out of the everyday surroundings of an ordinary womanhood; he has made my life real and earnest; he has—no, you must not interrupt me—he has taught me the things to love and the things to despise; he——"

"One second! Has he taught you to love effort and to despise self-indulgence?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I ask because I happen to know that——" and then Angus Kennedy paused, and dropping the hand he had been holding in his, he stepped back, and folding his arms across his breast, argued thus with himself:

"Shall I, or shall I not, tell this girl that the man to whom she has given her clean young heart is a victim of morphia, and must be a lunatic or dead in two years? Are these the weapons a gentleman can decently use to gain his ends; because, after all, the secret of my interference is my own craving for her? No," he decided, at length, "I will not sink to his level; I will not use weapons that would be as unmanly as his are immoral." And then the fierceness of the man's love was gone. 'Twas no longer volcanic—a lava rush of yearnings that almost burnt through the outer crust of his gentility—but a halo of divine origin, half pity, an infinite desire to help her, half, undefined subdued passion, and the whole, lustless and beautiful, encompassed him.

"May I take you," he said, with a mixture of love and authority, "to a gully near here, where we can talk without the possibility of interruption? 'Tis only a quarter of a mile; the walk will help me to collect my thoughts, and decide as to my line of country."

And she, feeling herself in the presence of a man entitled by his very tone of manhood to command, went.

We must not pause here to note the time of year, the hour of the day, and the climatic conditions. Destinies are at stake. 'Tis enough to know that April was with them, and in harmony.

I wish I could define the difference between this man's hold over her and Stewart's. The one was strength and manhood, the other poetry and dreams, and both play their part with women.

At eighteen 'tis the man who dreams the girl loves

best, at twenty-four the man who *does*. Our heroine was twenty-two, and held midway between the two attractions like Mahomet's coffin. May the good God lead her earthwards.

They are in the gully now; and sitting (not hand in hand, for his resolve is made) between the outstretched roots of a mighty oak, that like the knees of some sleeping giant shield them from the cold blast of the outer world.

"I am an awful brute, Miss Luxford, I can't help it. Love can and does constantly make brutes of men. You love my friend Stewart. He is not worthy of your love now, but we will make him so. You shall do your part, I will do mine. He's a good chap, we will save him from himself."

"Mr. Kennedy, there's some ghastly secret here. I have a right to ask you what it is. It may be that my life is at stake."

"There is a secret, Miss Luxford, and seeing that I have yielded you for myself I will best fulfil my ambition by telling you what it is. You remember the fire and Stewart's heroism, you remember the cost of it in pain to him, and you remember my giving him something that made that pain bearable. The stuff I gave him was morphia—it may have been wrong—I don't know that it was—I acted up to my lights, but had I known as much then as I do now about this terrible drug, I would not have taken upon myself the responsibility of administering it to such a man."

"Why do you say, such a man?"

"You won't understand, Miss Luxford. Morphia is like alcohol in this respect : the very men who most need it and derive the most benefit from it, are the ones most certain to become a victim to its fascination. It is only dangerous to the man to whom it is of service, and with him it becomes a habit."

"But surely it is not a habit with Mr. Stewart, yet?"

"I fear it is, Miss Luxford, not so much because of the quantity he has taken, but because his disposition leads him to a love of it."

"But can't we save him?" and the girl's anxiety ran in wavelets through her voice, and forgetting all else but her love for this man, she grasped Kennedy's hand in hers; and then more slowly, with all the woman—the desperately good woman rising in her, till it almost drowned her in gulping sobs: "We *must* save him. His love for me will do something, my love for him shall do more, and you will help us."

And then she fell back and trembled like a leaf in the first breath of autumn. 'Twas only a moment she lay there, and then with the rapidity of a woman's intuition she grasped all that her knowledge gave her of the situation.

"Mr. Kennedy, difficulties are best met by boldly facing them. Just now you told me you loved me; I will test your love. Tell me what is going to be the history of this drug business?"

"What do you mean, Miss Luxford?"

"Please don't beat about the bush; you know what I mean, and what I am determined to find out. How

will it alter Mr. Stewart if he goes on ; will it injure him mentally ? ”

“ No.”

“ Well, what does happen ? Please don’t let me have to pump this out of you. ’Tis bad enough to have all my hopes poisoned, without the effort of raising the poison myself.”

Dorothy had let fall her hat and risen from her seat into the tragedy of a great womanhood, and standing in front of Kennedy, threw herself all unconsciously into the graceful attitude of a great thought seized.

“ Mr. Kennedy, you and I will have to be true friends in this matter, and I must tell you something. Last night Mr. Stewart and I walked up the river’s bank together, and I felt so privileged among women to be near him. He had been all the evening telling me of things with which you will have no sympathy : of great thoughts he had, and great hopes, bright dreams, and yearnings for a better life ; and, I am sure unintentionally, he finished up with a poem from Browning that he knows by heart, beginning like this :

‘ Grow old along with me.’

I don’t think I am an ordinary girl, I have no ambition for station or wealth beyond what I have. I know nothing of the weak, frivolous attachments of other women, that come and go like April showers ; but I love this man, and if I know myself, I will save him.” And then in the face of the effort she became relaxed and fearful, her arms fell to her side, and her courage ebbed from her, but only for a moment ; and then she

shook out the loose, uncultured hair that hung in Nature's way about her forehead, and told herself nothing was impossible to the girl that loved as she did ; that neither heights nor depths, things past nor things to come should stand between her and her mission.

As Dorothy and Kennedy walked slowly homewards, he prepared her, as best he could, for the fight she had gone so fearlessly into.

" No, Miss Luxford, his intellect will not go, unless you bracket morals with the ordinary attributes of intellect. Oh ! excuse me, but you must come and lean over this gate a moment. I see that Nature has dashed on to the black-board of yonder sky (as Stewart would say) an illustration of the very thing I want to make you grasp. Do you see that mountain yonder, with a cloud about its head, and another about its feet ? That is what morphia does for a man. It hides the head and the feet of him, it kills all the absolutely animal and most of the Divine."

" And leaves what ? "

" You see what, in my illustration yonder. No basis of capacity—*that* is morphia-drowned, as it were, in the mist rising from the plain, and, although you have the bulk of the thing rushing heavenwards, it ends in no apex of achievement ; that, too, is lost in a cloud-land of unreality."

" But the mountain base, apex and all, is still there. Both those clouds will go, Mr. Kennedy, when the sun comes out."

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE is no time when the shadow of coming events, be they black or bright, is so keenly felt as at the moment of waking, just before one catches one's entire consciousness; 'tis the last dying echo of yesterday that has, dream-fed, run through the night.

Angus felt this on the morning following his interview with Dorothy and his promise of great self-sacrifice; as full consciousness came to him his very words returned: "No, Miss Luxford, he is not worthy of your love now, but we will make him so, you and I together." Even in the light of her presence the promise had been difficult, but now in the cold morning, in the solitude of his bedroom, how nearly an impossibility. Apart from the fact that Stewart was a morphia-taker, he was not, Kennedy felt, worthy of her; he had no sympathy with men of this temperament. "Poetry! what the deuce does one want with such stuff?" he asked himself aloud as he viciously buttoned his collar. "Let him take a twenty mile walk, or half an hour with the gloves; that would knock this rot out of him." However, Kennedy was a man of honour, and directly he had finished his breakfast he started on his mission, principally conscious of something like a certainty lying in the deep caverns of his heart, that the

gods would somehow intervene and save Dorothy for him.

Stewart was sitting in his dressing-gown over the fire—he was still at the cottage—and reading the “Ancient Mariner,” and finding there the echo of a fellow-craving.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, as Kennedy entered, “here comes my saviour—here comes the man who found my life a hurricane, and made it a May morning; who, standing over the tempest of my existence, and holding a little syringe aloft, said, ‘Peace, be still!’”

“Why the deuce can’t you be truthful, Stewart, and say, ‘Here comes the man who first poisoned me, and then taught me to poison myself’?”

“Because it would be simply a lie—because I am a better, a nobler, and a happier man than I was before I took that drug. But, Kennedy, from your store of medical knowledge, tell me this: Can opium, with its infinite capacities, be without a mission? Surely not. And if it has a mission, what greater one can you find than that of bringing quietude and happiness to such men as I was before I knew its healing balm? Does not its very existence prove design in Nature, and would not my disuse of it amount to a positive sin?”

Kennedy paved the way for his mission by his reply.

“I take it,” he said, “that a man’s first duty is to marry and have healthy children; his second, to do some honest, lasting work; his third, to overcome his difficulties, whether they lie within or without him. Now, granting I am right, how does opium, speaking from

your own experience of it, bear upon my rendering of man's mission?"

When Kennedy looked up for his reply, his first impulse was one of intense sorrow for the victim of his sudden questioning; the white, sweat-bedecked brow of the man, and his trembling hands, told only too plainly how terrible had been the avalanche of realisation.

The victim of opium has castles—many of them—but they are in the air; he has intense longings, but they lie entirely without the range of practicality. He has his love; a love unsullied by passion, and, again, unlike the love of other men, in that it is mainly begotten of a desire for sympathy; but there comes, at last, a terrible day of reckoning; a day when some sudden awakening, or some transient incident, calls upon him to look upon this tragic contrast—the picture of what he is, and the picture of what he might have been. Then he stands aghast between the two, and sweats out his agony.

It was into this terrible position that Stewart had been suddenly flung. His tearless but widely opened eyes, when Kennedy looked up, were staring fixedly into space at something his companion saw not. 'Twas a panorama of the projects of the schoolboy, and their golden dreams; the aspirations of college life, and their firm endeavour; and, lastly, his love for Dorothy. And, as they went past him, Truth bade him write under each, "Impossible," "Impossible," "Impossible."

"Dearest old man!" exclaimed Kennedy, rushing forward with the impulsive goodness of big, healthy men, "I know all you are thinking, and I know it is not true. Don't, don't, I pray you, look like that! We will help

you. You have some suffering to go through, but you can do it for my sake," then, in a lower voice, "and for hers."

Still the dazed man kept his dry eyes fixed on the same pattern of the wall-paper, and let the beads of perspiration roll down his face unchecked. Kennedy's words had no meaning for him. "Help," indeed ! Was he not beyond the reach of human help ? Had he not, in chasing the dreamy butterfly of self-indulgence, fallen across a tombstone ?

Then there crept over him an infinite desire to be alone, and as the wounded lion seeks the deepest and darkest jungle, he with difficulty rose from his chair, and motioning for Kennedy to leave him, sought his bedroom. Once there, he made for the bedside ; for a few seconds he steadied himself by the bed-post irresolute. He had not prayed for years, but now in the face of this terrible business, he yearned for Divine help, and throwing himself on his knees, and burying his face in his hands, he groaned forth in broken, disconnected sentences his desperate needs : " God bless the bad, the good Thou hast already blessed in making them good. Thou hast given me one life, I have thrown that away ; canst Thou not give me another, if not for my own, for her sake ? " and so on and on, until at length he rose from his knees strengthened somewhat.

CHAPTER XV.

ANGUS too felt that more than human help for Stewart was necessary at this juncture, and after he had left him he wandered up the road, sad at heart. "I have started on my mission," he told himself, "but I have started badly, roughly and cruelly, as I always do things. However, he must be seen again soon, directly the first shock is over." He was barely a hundred yards from the cottage when Dorothy turned the corner with her morning basket of flowers for the invalid.

"Good morning, Miss Luxford ; are you making for the cottage ?"

"I am, Mr. Kennedy. How is Mr. Stewart? Have you seen him?"

"I have, and you must not take your flowers this morning, but turn back with me. I am anxious to talk to you."

There was a tone of authority in his voice that told her it would be wiser to obey. There were several moments of silence, broken at length by her :

"What has happened, Mr. Kennedy? I am all anxiety. Anything very bad?"

"No, nothing very bad. Do you remember my promise to you yesterday?"

"Indeed, I do!"

"Well, I started on its fulfilment about an hour since, and I fear I have done my work so far all too crudely. I have no art in these matters, as you know, Miss Luxford."

"But pray tell me what happened."

Kennedy then related as best he could the scene that had just transpired, leaving out most of the horrors of it.

Again there was a long pause, and again Dorothy was the first to break it:

"Mr. Kennedy, I know you are capable, and yesterday you told me you were willing to be a great friend to me. You know from my own lips how much I love him. Now will you be candid with me, quite candid, and in the light of this morning's experience, answer me again the question I asked you yesterday? Can we save him? Why do you hesitate?"

"I hesitate because you have set me a terribly difficult problem. I don't suppose any answer of mine will much influence you. Women's loves are as difficult to break as they are to understand."

Dorothy shook her shoulders impatiently.

"I beg your pardon," Kennedy continued. "Let me lead you as tenderly as I can right up to the front of the difficulty. To cure any man of the morphia habit is a herculean task, and, as I told you yesterday, with a man of Stewart's temperament the difficulty is still greater. It would be unfair of me to allow you to start upon this mission with your eyes but half opened. I know something of the devotion of which you are

capable. I know from what I saw this morning something of your influence over him, and I know I will do all I can to help you."

Dorothy stopped suddenly in the road, and facing her companion, looked at him "with wide blue eyes as in a picture," and from those eyes there leapt a fixity of purpose that he understood.

"Mr. Kennedy," she began, in slow, measured tones, "you have been, and you are, a great friend to us. I am, I see, starting upon no small crusade; but my resolve is made. As you say, women's loves are not easily broken; but you must remember that, in this case, we are dealing with the love of a woman whose life and whose soul have been saved by the same man, and surely that man demands some sacrifice at her hands. I will make that sacrifice." Then she was silent, and, looking down, drew lines in the dust with her parasol. When she looked up, her face had yielded some of its heroism, and gone back to its sadness. "I have, since our conversation of yesterday, Mr. Kennedy, been thinking a good deal of what you said to me, and it has dawned upon me that the increased mental capacity, and, I ought to add, increased soul capacity, that I have acquired from intercourse with Mr. Stewart has been bought at the expense of his own, and, in the stillness of last night, I registered a vow in heaven that they should only be lent. But let us turn."

Throughout Dorothy's declaration Angus had carried on a great struggle with himself—a struggle not so much between his duty and his desire—for his inner consciousness told him that his duty and his desire lay in the

same direction—but between his sense of right and his anxiety to prove his love. The sacrifice he was making he felt to be enormous ; but then it was not fatal, for Dorothy was sure to fail, and then she would be his by the divine right of his help in attempting to save Stewart. However, the die was cast, and——

“Miss Luxford, have you thought out any plan of campaign ?”

“You are to be the architect of this undertaking. I will find the means of carrying out your scheme. Do you object to this division of labour, Mr. Kennedy ?”

“Not in the least, if you will allow me to undertake my share of your work also.”

“Oh !” she replied, with an attempt at smiling ; “don’t you fear for me. My lot will be so much more bearable than that of Penelope and her thousand and one descendants who can wait and watch only, doing nothing for their Ulysses. But here’s our house ; shall I come on, or go in ?”

“You had better go in, and I will make suitable excuses. Good-bye.”

He was going, when Dorothy called him back, and giving him her hand, said :

“I wonder, Mr. Kennedy, if you at all know all I think of your great goodness to me. After what passed yesterday, I know something of the sacrifice you think you are making, and I thank you with all my heart.”

With one look at him through tears more eloquent than ever words can be, she dropped his hand, and rushed into the house.

Angus strolled down to the cottage. He had been

away two hours, and by this time he expected to find Stewart prepared to listen to him and his plans. It is true he had formed no plans, but they could talk the matter over, and some scheme would come of it.

When he entered, Stewart was pacing up and down the sitting-room with head bent, his arms folded, and still wearing his dressing-gown.

In those two hours he had lived a lifetime. The morphia maniac knows no mean ; he is either in the seventh heaven of ecstasy, or the lowest hell of despair ; which, depends upon the date and size of his last injection. This rule is only broken at those rare intervals when some extreme bouleversement occurs. Then the harmony of his nerve-fibre is converted, morphia or no morphia, into the most hideous discord ; he drops in one moment from his sunlit cloudland of delight, where joy may be unreal but is nevertheless intense, into a howling wilderness of despair, where either to think or resolve is an absolute impossibility. Around him the darkness thickens, and what is worse than all, he is alone, absolutely alone, but for black-robed "sorrow and her family of sighs."

As Kennedy entered, Stewart gave one look at him, and then continued his march, with eyes downcast.

When Kennedy had seated himself at the fireside, he opened the conversation :

"I thought it was best to leave you just now, Paul. Solitude, for an hour or so, was, I knew, the best help for you ; but, now you have thought this matter out from your point of view, come, sit down, and hear it from mine."

"Thanks ; I won't sit down."

"You had much better. You will only exhaust yourself, and I can talk to you so much better if you will only take that chair."

Stewart did as he was bid, and, burying his face in his hands, allowed Angus to talk to the top of his head.

"You know, old man," Angus began, "I have seen this catastrophe coming on for some time. Your very love of morphia told me from the first that you were the last man with whom it could safely come into contact. You were born with what you would call a poetical temperament, but what I should define as an imperfect manhood."

Stewart looked up with a glance of pained astonishment, but did not speak.

"I don't want to pain you, old fellow," Angus continued, "but I am going, before we start to cure you, to put this matter upon a firm basis of fact, so that in the few weeks to come we can pull together. Moreover, I have yet to learn that it is uncomplimentary to call a man's manhood imperfect. I will, if you choose, use the new scientific name for you, and call you a neurotic ; and it is for the neurotics the world saves its praises. Every reform and every step onward that we scientists know evolution has really brought about—and would have accomplished at the same pace, and with less bloodshed, without their help—is ascribed to them, for the simple reason that the eye of the mass sees the banners only, and not the plodding army beneath. However, enough of science. Let us start upon these premises : You are a neurotic, and a neurotic, as far as I can understand the meaning of the word, is a man who

has lost the ballast of practicality that ought to govern all intellectual work. You know of old, I have no sympathy with that sort of thing. We are differently constituted. We see in all things that which we bring with us the tendency to see. You in the moaning pine-tree find the echo of your own sorrows ; I, a possible telegraph post. In the weeping willow you find portrayed your tendency to tears ; it reminds me of salicine, the new cure for fevers. Leaves sigh for you ; for me they stop drains and breed pestilence. And on these grounds—the grounds of what you would call my deplorable utilitarianism—I base my power to help you. My right to help you springs from the fact that you saved my life.”

“Stay, Kennedy,” moaned Stewart. “I may as well tell you at once I am past saving.”

Then he looked up with the face of an old man, and in a hollow voice that came from the broken heart of him, continued : “Kennedy—Angus, since we first met this morning when you gave me your idea of man’s duty, which, by the way, was my death knell, I have lived, I think, a century. You have given me your idea of opium, I will in exchange tell you what this morning’s review has taught me of it. It robs one not only of all sense of responsibility, but of one’s capacity for undertaking responsibility, and substitutes a haze of poetical unreality. I use the word unreality because I am convinced that, with the exception of the ‘Ancient Mariner’ and some of De Quincey’s prose, nothing done under the influence of opium can live. Oh !” and he buried his face again, “if you only knew the hundreds of times that I have sat up for hours, and written verses that I have

honestly thought at the time were the finest things in the language, and paced the room reciting them over and over again to myself, only to awaken in the morning to find them absolutely worthless, and not even rhythmical."

He was silent a moment, and then continued :

"No, I have drifted away from the firm shores of life, active, wholesome life, out here into mid-ocean, where not even your hand can reach me nor God's interference save. I have carried with me the one bright possession of my life, the one hope of past days, and the one thing that might in those past days have saved me, but it is too late."

Again he hid his face, and between sobs no longer to be restrained repeated : "Too late ! too late !"

In a few minutes he was calm again, and continued :

"You may suspect my meaning when I speak of the one bright possession of my life, but you cannot think me brute enough to hold to it, and so in one inevitable ruin involve another's. No, Kennedy, to come back to the point, your kindly heart biasses you ; you do not know me as I know myself, and I honestly tell you I am past saving."

"But, Paul, old man, there is no other course open for you. You know you cannot go on as you are, and death is not to be had for the asking. But we have had enough of this for to-day, I am going to leave you with this assurance : you *will* be saved, and we will spend many happy, joyously happy years together yet. You may take your morphia to-night, I have a special reason for asking you to."

CHAPTER XVI.

"THEN you are still without a scheme, Mr. Kennedy." Dorothy was speaking ; they were standing beneath the verandah of the Rectory, the morning succeeding the day whose history is recorded in the last chapter.

"No, Miss Luxford, I have formulated no scheme as yet. You see I am in this difficulty : I have to deal with a man who still believes himself sane, and who would for a certainty decline to place himself beneath the only treatment that can restore him."

"And that ?"

"That would be restraint."

"Restraint !"

"Yes, 'tis the only logical treatment, and all data go to prove the only effectual one. If Stewart could be brought to tell himself that he had lost his own power of will, and must therefore borrow some other person's until his was restored to him, there would be but little difficulty ; but he could never be induced to consent to this."

"I could make him do this, if you are really of opinion that with all its objections it is the only thing possible."

"There is no doubt of it, Miss Luxford, and if

you can induce him, you have already won half the battle."

"I will go at once, Mr. Kennedy ; shall I find you here when I come back ? "

"Yes, Miss Luxford, I will wait ; but won't you take time to consider what arguments you will use, what inducements you will hold out ? "

"No, Mr. Kennedy, thanks ; I am the inducement, my request the argument, and God will help me.

She ran upstairs nominally for her hat and gloves, but really to ask God's help. 'Tis only women who really wrestle with the Almighty. The capacity as far as men are concerned, died with Jacob. Since then we men have been too busy cutting canals, erecting telegraph posts, and making needed soap. Well, Dorothy did wrestle with the Lord on this occasion for His help in saving the love that she had during the past six months nightly thanked Him for the giving.

See her now, as with the firm, potent step of one who has a great mission, and no doubt of her capacity to perform it, she goes fearlessly forth to her first battle. Twenty yards from the cottage door she stops, remembering that she has not formulated even her opening remarks.

"No," she says, half aloud ; "I have asked God's help, and I know He will not forsake me."

Stewart opened the door himself, and, prepared as Dorothy had been to some extent by Kennedy's remarks for a change in him, she was not prepared for this. Stewart had always looked the invalid, but now, with

two sleepless nights behind him, no food, and no hope, with his large sunken eyes and hollow jaws, he was simply appalling. For one moment Dorothy stepped back, but soon recovered herself.

"I have come to see you, Mr. Stewart, and as you do not choose to invite me, I shall come in unasked." She said this in a firm tone of kindness.

"Oh, really, Miss Luxford, I beg your pardon. I am dreadfully untidy, I have not even brushed my hair, but you must not mind, I have been ill and not slept; pray take your old seat."

Dorothy, as she walked to it, placed her basket of favourite flowers on the table, remarking: "You see I have not forgotten your flowers, as I did yesterday."

"It is very good of you. You are always good, too good," he added, as he turned to the diamond-paned window, partly that he might hide a tear stealing down his cheeks, and partly because he was ashamed, now that he knew himself, to look upon her brave womanhood; a womanhood that he had foolishly thought it was his mission to educate, but which, all the while, was so far above him.

Then there was a most uncomfortable pause, broken by Dorothy, who, with a woman's intuitive heroism, rushed into her mission.

"Mr. Stewart, will you come and sit down near me?" When he had done so, she continued: "And may I this morning call you Paul?"

"No, no, no!" he groaned. "Oh, please don't! Oh, Miss Luxford, you know nothing, and I can tell you nothing beyond this—that you must not use that word again; it would kill me!"

Dorothy rose, and, coming behind him, placed one hand on each shoulder, saying :

"I shall call you Paul this morning without your permission. That name best fits in with my mission." She hesitated one moment, and then, taking a deep breath : " Paul, I have—if I would do, as you have often said, 'the duty that lies nearest me'—I have to step entirely outside the ordinary bounds of womanhood, I have to ask you this one question : Do you love me ? "

"Love you ! love you ! Ah, my God ! and how much ! "

" Well, Paul, that was to be my next question. How much *do* you love me ? "

Stewart lifted his head from the table, and, swinging round, took both her hands in his. They were both standing now, and he, being several inches taller than she, looked down into her honest face, so full of intensity and love for him.

" Miss Luxford," he began, in a voice tremulous with emotion, " no language can tell you how intensely I love you, and no words can possibly convey the greatness of my sin in admitting it. Oh, please sit down ! I have no right to touch your hand. These of mine," he exclaimed, holding his attenuated fingers aloft, " are stained, stained with sin, and all the 'perfumes of Arabia' could not make them clean enough for your acceptance."

She sat back on to the sofa behind her and was silent while he unburdened himself. He paced up and down the room twice, and, stopping suddenly, faced her.

" Miss Luxford, I have deceived you consistently, and not altogether unconsciously. I have preached to

you of your duties here, and neglected all my own ; I have talked to you of beauty, and all the while been making myself into the most hideous of failures ; I have raved against the sins of commerce and veneer, and yet what are their sins compared with mine ? I have argued for truth, and have been all the while a living lie." Here Stewart sank into a chair and again buried his face in his hands, and groaned out : " I have dared to love you. I, with all this blackness around me—and all self-induced—have dared to love you, and perhaps I have—you make me fear I have taught you to love——"

Before he could finish, Dorothy had bounded to her feet and taken her old position at the back of his chair ; but now her face was so near his, that their fast-falling tears mingled and fell together.

" Paul, Paul, do not say more ; I have learnt all—I knew it before I came this afternoon. Yes, you have taught me to love you, and I am going to prove my love ; we are going to save you, Mr. Kennedy and I together. Now I will get a chair and sit near you, you must turn round, and I will tell you the decision that we have arrived at—that's right. Now you must not interrupt me."

My own limited knowledge of the worlds of life or literature affords me no picture so full of tragedy as that of these young people sitting there side by side, leaning forward with their arms on their knees and their hands clasped, and staring through the fast dying fire into the future, he mostly conscious of a lost manhood and a nobility sacrificed, and she of womanhood increased and a nobility to be gained. Forty-eight hours

had converted the teacher into the taught, the leader into the led, and the pupil into the saviour of the man to whom she, poor child, believed she owed all that she had that was good and noble.

It was because De Quincey was not an opium-taker by nature, not a neurotic, that he tells us, "Happiness can now be bought for a penny, and carried in the waistcoat pocket." Had he been like our poor friend Stewart he would have substituted, "Misery can be bought for sixpence, and when once bought must be always carried in the waistcoat pocket."

The life of the poppy is the history of the man who gathers it—writ small—it cometh up as a flower, a white, innocent flower, reckless in its short-lived beauty; then follows the fruit, with its black potent tears—tears potent enough to wash away destinies, the love of God, nay, in the end even the love of woman, the last thing that leaves us.

Let us go back to the cottage.

"You told me just now, Paul, that you loved me, and when I asked you how much, you said, 'God knows.' That goes without saying; *I* must know."

"I never knew myself till yesterday, and now I cannot tell you, now that I must lose your love."

"You shall not lose my love, Paul, if—if you will consent to be restored. Mr. Kennedy and I will help you so much, we have not forgotten that you saved our lives. Since, then, for me you have made the life you saved worth having, may we not do something in return——" Then she paused for a moment, and

placing a trembling hand on both of his, continued :
“Do you remember Rabbi Ben Ezra ?

‘Grow old along with me ;
The best is yet to be.’

Has that poem lost its prophecy for us ?”

“Dorothy ! I too may call you Dorothy, just to-day——”

“You may.”

“Well, Dorothy, then, do you see this little book ?”
As he spoke he drew a small handbook from his breast pocket, entitled “The Opium Habit.” “That book is written by a German who has made opium his special study. I read it all last night, and the more I read, the more and more impossible became the task you would set me.”

“Is not the inducement sufficient, or have you deceived me this morning about your love for me ?”

“Oh, please, do not talk to me like that, nor in that tone of voice ! If you only knew it, I am standing here, and have been for days past, between heaven and hell—the heaven of your love and the hell of my habit—unworthy to rise to the one, and unwilling to sink to the other. And I am alone, alone ! Oh, God !” he groaned, folding his face in his hands. “I never knew the horror of that word before—alone, alone !”

“Am I not near you ?”

“In the flesh only—in the spirit, no one is, nor can be——”

“Well, Paul, dear Paul, let us get on to this ques-

tion of recovery. For your own sake, and for ours, you must be saved ; and there is only one way."

"And that?" Stewart asked, looking anxiously round.

"You are to go, for a time, to a home which Mr. Kennedy will find for you, where cases like yours are treated."

"In other words, I am to be confined as a lunatic—herded with the idiotic, and dictated to by some stupid despot that 'runs the show.' No, thank you, Miss Luxford ; I know this comes from Kennedy, would you kindly tell him for me that death is bad enough, but it is preferable——"

"But no one need know you are there ; you can go in under an assumed name. I will come and stay near you, and see you as often as I can, and read to you. Surely, if not for your own sake, you will do this for mine."

Stewart did not reply, and after a short pause Dorothy continued :

"I should not have to ask you twice ; is not the restoration of your health a sufficient inducement?"

"Miss Luxford—Dorothy, I will be quite candid with you. Do you see that trembling hand ? That is the outcome of abstinence from opium, and it is indicative of my whole condition. I have taken but one dose to-day ; this morning, helped of that five grains, I resolved to be worthy of your love and make the effort. My first step was to empty my bottle into the fire, and then I placed the syringe beneath my heel and ground it to powder—and so started the unwinding of the

chain. I placed my two selves in the arena—my old self, the clean, old, healthy self that God gave my mother, and the artificial, opium-fed, vicious self that you have known ; and they are fighting it out.”

“ And who is winning ? ”

“ Why do you ask me when you are so totally unable to understand the motives and cravings that are governing my very existence ? Think of this : on the one side I have the chance of your love, a career, wealth, comfort, and a happiness begotten of constant companionship with *you* ; on the other, misery, poverty, loneliness, and desolation. The arbitrator between these two destinies is one grain of opium, the effect of which could only last an hour or two, leaving me worse than I am now ; and now, please, Dorothy, do not doubt my love for you. I hesitate ; I actually—why I know not—argue with myself, if, for the sake of a moment’s freedom from the yearnings for that drug that is swallowing all else, I shall cease this unwinding of this chain that I started only this morning. Dorothy, you do not understand me. I am beneath your contempt. My love for you is real and earnest, nay, desperate ; but—but, oh my infinite need of it ! ”

Great tears were streaming down Paul’s face as he rose from his chair and again paced the floor ; suddenly he stopped, was apparently irresolute, then, excusing himself for five minutes, left the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

WE will go with Stewart to his bedroom.

The door was barely closed when his whole manner changed; he dropped his languid, listless way, and hurried with an almost maniacal expression and movement to the dressing-table. Three drawers he opened unsuccessfully; in the fourth he found a small parcel wrapped in newspaper. The simple sight of it threw a radiant halo of happiness over his face. Quickly he tore away the paper, and found an old syringe and a bottle of morphia packed for a journey, that was never taken.

The ecstasy of delight at what you will call his hell made nearer, but what to him was a heaven immediately possible, set his hands trembling. 'Twas a terrible question—could he, with hands shaking as his were, get that syringe filled and the needle beneath his skin, and peace once more?

With a giant's effort he succeeded, and instantly, but for the sin of it, became his old wholesome self again. He washed his face, brushed his hair, hurried on some decent clothing, and rejoined Dorothy.

With a firm step he approached her, and she—seeing instantly the reformation—bounded from her chair, placed her hands upon his shoulders, and exclaimed:

"God, I see, has helped you. I knew He would, I asked Him to, this morning."

A laugh, a far-away laugh, that was three parts sigh, and "Yes, a god has helped me," was his only reply.

When they had sat silently for some minutes, Dorothy looked up and said :

"You see, I have been to some extent right, Paul, in arguing, these months past, for the personality of God. We, in discussing the beauty of poetry, and the poetry of beauty, have been but toying with the hem of His garment. I heard you praying, at least I heard you groaning, and I prayed also, asking that, if it were possible, this cup might pass from you. Now, we will be brave together, you and I."

Then she took a lappel of his coat in each hand of hers, and, standing well back, looked studiously and proudly at him, and after a pause said :

"I came down this morning, Paul, believing in you. I knew, of course, quite well, that you could not have taught me all the good you have, without a big basis of capacity for good yourself."

With the word "basis" her mind went back to Kennedy's analogy of three days before, and taking Stewart's hand in hers, she led him to the old seat, and told him of it—of the mountain with its base and head cloud-hid, and how, in the light of her love, she had sworn the cloud should melt away.

"You said a horrid thing to me one day, Paul," she continued. "You told me religion was made for women, and women were made for men. How I hated you for saying that! But now I see it may be so ; and surely

they need ask for no other mission than to be conductors of God's help and love. But why don't you speak to me?"

"I cannot speak to you. I have nothing to say that you would understand. You must leave me to fight out my own destiny. All you can do is to go home and pray for me again; and will you use our old prayer from Mahomet—'God bless the bad, the good Thou hast already blessed in making them good.'"

"How strange! That *is* the prayer I used this morning." Then hurriedly: "Not because I thought you were bad; but—but—I don't know why."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"YES, a god has helped me," Stewart said aloud to himself after Dorothy had left him, "but not the God she thought." He was pacing the room rapidly, now strong and well again. "And," he continued, "no 'god in the germ,' but an omnipotent, health-giving, prayer-answering god. Indeed, miracles are cheap enough! Ten minutes since I was a wreck, a victim of unrest, my every nerve asking for something, my life ebbing from me; and now, ah! now I am clothed upon with a peace that passeth all understanding—bathed in the continual dew of its blessing. Ah! that's the expression—'the continual dew.' But—but—but what about her?" and he became silent and serious again. Then folding his arms, he asked aloud: "Which shall I do? Shall I

'Sin the whole sin,
Sure that God observes,
Or go live my life out?
Life would try my nerves.'

Or shall I make the effort?"

There was a rap at the door.

"Come in! Hullo, Angus! I did not expect to see you again to-night."

"I just ran down, old man, to see how you were

getting on without the enemy. Why, Paul, you look as fit as——” At that moment Stewart turned to the light, and his companion saw that his pupils were no larger than pins’ heads, and thereby learnt instantly the false source of his improvement. “Oh, Paul, Paul! you have gone back to it!”

“How do you know?”

“Your eyes tell the secret.”

“And if I have?”

“You are that much nearer hell.”

“I could not be nearer hell than I have been all day.”

“You forget, old man, that that was the wholesome hell of recovery. But there, I suppose it is no use lecturing you.”

“Not a bit. Look you here, Angus, I’ll be quite candid. I love you. We have been chums always; together we have

‘Ate, drank, laughed, loved, lived, and liked life well.’

There is some one I love even more than I love you; some one without whom life seems to me an impossibility; and yet—but why should I unpack my heart with words? It won’t help me.”

“It may. Anyhow, it will give me the chance of replying, of showing you your position from my point of view.”

“Well, then,” Stewart continued,

“Beneath the surface stream, shallow and light,
Of what we say we are; beneath the stream as light
Of what we think we are, there flows in constant current strong,
Obscure and deep, the central stream of what we are indeed.”

And what am I indeed? I'll tell you. I am the possessor of an unbalanced manhood, the victim of unrest. My inner life so far has been one long looking before and after, a pining for what 'is not.' It may be that my Maker made up to me in nerves what He deprived me of in physique. Anyhow, I know that the little storm of my life has nearly finished the wrecking of itself against the rock of destiny. 'Oh, Hamlet,' I often said to myself, during the glorious infancy of my morphia habit, 'had you only known of this blessed giver of rest, you might have climbed down from your bleak Nebo height to the peaceful plains of mediocrity.'"

Then Stewart was silent for a time, and Kennedy decided not to interrupt him. 'Twas as well that for once he should have rope enough.

When Stewart had walked up and down the room four or five times, with the spasmodic rapidity of the opium-taker, he stopped suddenly, and, facing Angus, continued :

"I am as much deformed mentally as your hunch-back is physically. You would say I have lost my power of self-control, and think probably that, by so saying, you had ended the matter. If I tell you that that lame man hobbling down the street yonder has a club-foot, he is none the less lame, nor more responsible, for my explanation ; the club-foot is still there as a part of his heritage. Your stupid police magistrate who harangues the chronic drunkard, your hide-bound coroner with his perpetual 'Temporary insanity,' are exactly on the same level with yourself, when you talk, as I know you will presently, of my want of self-control. I can't, for the

life of me, think why you did not rush across the road just now and tell that man he was lame."

"That man was born lame."

"And I?"

"You were born with a capacity for the enjoyment of life quite beyond that given to the majority of men. You were lent many talents, and you are burying them. No; look you here, Paul. I have listened very patiently to you—now you must return the compliment; and mind you, I have some stern, stubborn truths to tell you. 'Tis probably the last time I shall bore you. As an amateur scientist, I admit most of what you say about mental deformity. My sparse reading has taught me this much—that the world has no tragedies for us like the inner lives of its leaders. 'Was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow?' has been, it seems to me, the groan of the whole of them, from Carlyle back to Job. 'Tis the price paid for the capacity to foresee and forefeel our futures; but there is a vast difference between the voluntary wrecking of a destiny and the destiny wrecked from the start. The one is a crime, the other a tragedy. No! you must not interrupt me. I know what you are going to say—that it is in no way voluntary. But I remember you when you thoroughly enjoyed life. You had your fits of the blues, of course, as we all had; but then you wrote a few verses (just as we took seidlitz powders), and were all right again. Ah! old man, how keen life was then! how intense! how it seemed as if everything was made for *us*! But, to continue. You had not, 'tis true, much physique; but you had enough, had you

taken care of it. Then came the fire and, as a result, the morphia, and the habit of it. Slowly its coils enveloped you ; it has already crushed the physical life out of you, and presently it will render your brain a hazy nonentity. If you only saw the terrible cloud hanging over you, I think you would make a desperate effort. Some ten per cent. of morphia maniacs get over the habit, won't you be one of the ten? Aren't the inducements sufficient? Oh! Paul, Paul, if I had but your motive, I would, I think, go through fire and water, nay, to the edge of the very grave itself, and think it nothing. Have you no such feeling? I have never spoken to you before of my own love for Miss Luxford, nor would I now, if the confession could be avoided ; but I do love her even more than my own life, and I have promised to prove my love by restoring you to your old self again, and making you worthy such a love as she is prepared to give you the moment you are well again. Paul, will you help me in this big task I have undertaken?"

When Angus looked up it was to see Stewart's face bathed in sweat. Great drops stood on his brow, the hollows in his cheeks were deepened, and his pupils dilating—for a great mental shock eats out the alkaloid just as certainly as physical effort, and leaves its victim prostrate.

Slowly Stewart moved over to Kennedy's side, and sinking on to his knees as a woman would, buried his face in his arms and groaned out :

"Oh, Angus, it never struck me before that you were behaving thus nobly towards me. I am worthy neither

your sacrifice nor her love, and yet I must have both if I am to live."

There was something of the child about him as he looked into Kennedy's face and continued :

"Do you know, Angus, I have sometimes been tempted to rather despise you and your great physique. We children of light, as we are pleased to call ourselves, have thought it the right thing to look down on men of muscle ; but you don't know how my view of things has altered during the last ten minutes. With your modest mention of the great sacrifice you are prepared to make for my sake there has dawned upon me a conception of nobility that we neurotics, as you call us, are, I am sure, quite incapable of making. Introspective analysis of oneself, one's feelings, one's sensations, must, when one comes to think of it, beget selfishness."

Then he rose to his feet and paced the room again, and both were silent. This was the second time that a speech from Angus had shocked him ; but the difference was this : the first only partially awakened him to his sense of degradation ; the second had finished the awakening, and added thereto the terrible contrast of Angus's clean and noble manhood. The fight must be now or never, that was obvious. And if now, how shall the battle be fought—alone, or with the help of Angus and Dorothy? Half an hour since, he would have caught at the help of both of them, as drowning men catch at straws. But now this terrible contrast ! Knowledge acquired by reading told him that the contrast would become more and more marked as time went on, and decided him to decline all help. No hand should

stopping suddenly on the hearthrug, he swings round and reviews his position for the thousandth time ; the intensity of his thought breaks through the feeble bond that holds men's tongues, and he thinks aloud, as all men do who think earnestly.

"On this side health, wealth, pleasure, Dorothy, but abstinence ; on that, death, but indulgence." The contrast was enormous, and would probably have been sufficient for any other than the morphia maniac ; but with him, it is entirely lost sight of in the increasing yearnings of his whole nervous system for its antidote ; "his needs are his nature, and his moods his mind."

And so having fought and lost one more battle with himself, he made for the bedroom and the fatal drawer where lay his destiny.

"There," he said, as he put away the syringe after giving himself a larger dose than usual. "There now, I'll pack." He pushed into his bag what clothes were absolutely necessary, and the six books that were essential to his very existence, which included both the Bible and Fielding ; and then taking up his pen, he, sitting at the table now, and still under the influence of the drug, wrote off almost without a pause these verses. They are given as indicative of his mental state :

DREAM-WORK.*

Around the visible diurnal sphere,
There floats a world that girds us like the space
Where wandering clouds and gliding beams career,
Its ever moving, murmuring populace.

* This poem was written by one of the lowest outcasts of Oxford Street, a lineal descendant, it may be, of De Quincey's "Ann," and under the influence of opium. M. C.

There all the lovelier thoughts concerned below,
 Ascending live and in celestial shapes;
 To that bright world, O mortal, wouldst thou go?
 Bind but thy senses, and thy soul escapes.

To care, to sin, to passion close thine eyes,
 Sleep in the flesh and see the dreamland rise;
 Hark to the gush of golden waterfalls,
 Or knightly troops at Archimagian walls.

In the green hush of Doric valleys mark
 The river maid her amber tressing knitting,
 When glow-worms twinkle under covert dark,
 Or silver clouds o'er summer stars are flitting,
 While jocund elves invade the moonlight sphere,
 Or "hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear."

Or list what time the violet urns of Dawn
 Scatter fresh dews, and the first skylark weaves
 Joy into song, the blythe Arcadian faun
 Piping to wood-nymphs under trembling leaves,
 While slowly gleaming through the purple glade
 Comes Evian's panther car and the pale Naxian maid.

As we have said elsewhere, among human failures it is only your morphia maniac that is fully conscious of the fact that he is making for destruction. The victim of alcohol and the many other vices that kill *from above* downwards loses both care and consciousness; while poisoned from below upwards, his path hellward is lighted up with the limelight of hyper-sensitiveness.

To avoid this picture, of which Stewart had of late seen far too much, he, when he had finished his poem, took up a copy of Browning that lay near him, and, opening at "Saul," read on and on until every nerve of him throbbed with the soulful harmonies of it. All else was gone now; the fact that his very existence was in danger was as nothing compared with this great

picture done by a master hand and made brilliant with his own intensity.

His tired brain grew weary as he neared the end, and he fell asleep in the chair with the book upon his knees, muttering the last lines over and over again, lower and lower, until only his lips moved :

“ And the little brooks murmured
Persistent and low,
With their all but hushed voices,
E'en so, it is so.”

CHAPTER XX.

THERE is no morning for the rest of mortals so tragic as the every morning of the morphia maniac. He awakes from a long sleep absolutely prostrate, bathed in perspiration, and his thoughts all afield. Slowly, and by great effort, he gathers up the events of yesterday ; but things done and said have, even when captured, a far-off ring about them. He, you must remember, is no longer an actor on the world's stage, but a mere spectator, and an indifferent one at that.

It was so with Stewart on the beginning of this his last day in the village, and the first of his great endeavour.

'Tis laborious work getting into one's clothes under such conditions as these. The moral man washes away the heaviness of the night in his tub, but the morphia-taker dreads cold water as the Devil does holy. Cleanliness is much nearer godliness than the glib users of the proverb have any idea. The nearer the shiver the farther from God.

Well, Stewart dressed and walked to the window. It was just five o'clock, and the tender hand of the morning was stretching from behind the Surrey hills o'er the sleeping world as though blessing it. Black, stolid

night had "hung her pearl in every cowslip's ear" and gone. The virgin moon—our night-nurse—pale and wan with the watching of her sister's children, was hurrying down the narrowing passage of the mountain's side, and Nature's feathered orchestra was tuning for matins.

'Twas early spring, and in the garden in front of Stewart's window, the snowdrops, earth's white-winged messengers sent to see if winter's gone, were bending their heads to whisper: "Yes, spring is here, the other flowers may come."

Nature was smokeless, clean and unafraid, and close to God, as she always is for the two hours that separate sunrise from man's awakening.

Stewart saw it all, its glory and its gloom, and wandering to the garden-gate that overlooked laughing vales below, and stern hills in the distance, found himself face to face with Nature. Then an infinite bitterness took hold of him, and shaking his closed fist at her, he groaned out: "Oh, thou cruellest of step-mothers, mother no longer, and to me withal. I, who have known and loved you as no other man has. I have taught others to love you; you've taken my hand and led me amid hills and vales, and whispered your secrets to me; you have soothed me to sleep upon your breast, and I have heard your great heart throb beneath—and all for what? What, but that, as the vivisectionist overfeeds his frogs, you might in the fulness of time have a better subject for dissection? You have baited your hook with keen, glad sensations, and you have caught a human. Why did you lead me by such pleasant paths hellwards? Why did you hide the cruellest of alkaloids in

the most beautiful of flowers—the white-petalled poppy ? Why ? Because you are cruel yourself, and fattened on disease and death. But you have not caught me yet. I have but sucked your bait as roaches will.”

Then Stewart looked at his watch and found he had an hour before the train left. He had time to make himself a cup of coffee ; he would have this, and go.

Once in the house, and over his ravings, the depression came on him again, and, willing or unwilling, impelled him to his bedroom where, on the dressing-table, the morphia and his syringe lay.

“Now, let me see,” said he, “what are my plans ? I am to take the next train to London, and make straight for my uncle’s. He’s a brusque, unsympathetic old fellow, but he may be able to advise me ; and, after all, he’s my nearest relation. But,” he said, “all this means effort, and effort means strength, and strength means—Yes ! I will have one more injection. ’Tis only right that I should. I owe it to myself to go through the day bravely.”

And so he took another injection, and the earth once more changed her garb for him, lost her cruelty and her terrible composure.

Suddenly Stewart remembered two letters he had to write, and, sitting down hurriedly, scribbled them off. Here they are :

“MY DEAR DOROTHY,

“I have, after much hesitation, decided to leave here for three months, during which time it will be better I should not write to you. I want you to know that the

motive driving me is my intense love for you, and my determination to be worthy of that love. I have a big battle to fight, but the memory of the happy days we have had together will help me.

“PAUL.”

“DEAR OLD MAN,—You can't help me ; I must fight this battle alone.

“Yours always,

“P. S.”

He folded these, and, directing them, left them on the table.

And then, strong in the strength of his last injection, he placed the syringe on the hearthstone, and his heel upon it, and ground it to powder, and emptied the morphia into the fire.

Stewart, as he trudged towards the station with his Gladstone bag in his hand, was a good illustration of the spasmodic way in which the morphia-taker does everything. He had no thought of failure. No Crusader ever started with a lighter heart, and he even laughed joyously as he thought of his return, three months hence, well and strong again, with Dorothy turning the corner yonder, hurrying to meet him.

CHAPTER XXI.

“AND the wages of sin is death.”

This was the text. The scene was a mission-room in the East End, the congregation men and women of the lower middle-class and quite poor order, the preacher none other than our friend Paul Stewart, looking much as of old.

He had joined a mission in the East End in the hope of breaking off and forgetting his habit in the excitement of the work.

This was his first sermon, and, as we have said, he had chosen for text, “And the wages of sin is death.”

He gave it out with an intense but intensely nervous voice. Then there was a long pause, during which the people were silent and expectant, knowing, from the man's manner, that some special message was coming to them.

In that pause Stewart had gained his self-possession, and, looking up, started his sermon with these astounding words deliberately given :

“With all due respect to St. Paul, the wages of sin is not death, but eternal life. Take a man away from his sinful surroundings, and you have robbed him of every chance of self-development ; and if God answered your daily prayer, ‘Lead us not into temptation,’ He would nearly deprive you of all hope of nobility. I need not,” Stewart continued, “remind you that every great man—and especially every greatly Christian man—has had his own particular thorn in the flesh sent to buffet him ; and the amount of his temptation, if overcome, is the

amount of his Christian worth. And did not The Master Himself once ask if it were possible the cup might be taken from Him? Those ten words, my friends, are the Bible's saving clause; ten golden links that hold Christ to men by establishing a common brotherhood of effort."

We can give no more than this taste of Stewart's first sermon. It was given extempore, and, in conjunction with the spasmodic manner of the man and his strange appearance, held them spell-bound.

He was living with his uncle now, a poor rector in the East End, who, with the help of his daughter—a notorious slummer—had undertaken the cure of him.

"He must have his mind occupied," the specialist had said—"given work to do. If allowed to sit in the arm-chair all day, and dream of the drug, the temptation to take it will become irresistible."

And so it came to pass that, after some persuasion, Stewart had been induced to help his cousin in her work; and once in it, his whole soul was there—his soul helped of opium. For, during the two months that have passed since last we saw him, he has made two distinct attempts to escape from his bondage. On the first occasion, he went nearly a week without the drug; on the second, five days; and now he is trying the most ineffectual of all methods—the gradual process.

During the contrition that followed his second failure, he had given over his syringe and his morphia to his cousin, with instructions to lessen the dose a quarter of a grain daily; and she, in her over-anxiety to cure him, had reduced it even faster, with the inevitable result that Stewart bought an instrument for himself, and was secretly more than making up for her reductions.

"Oh, Paul," his cousin exclaimed, the moment they had escaped from the silent and thoughtful crowd emerging from the mission-room door, "what a sermon you gave them! You were frightfully heterodox; but so terribly in earnest. What a tremendous preacher you will make, when you have quite given that stuff up! Of course you will take orders; your eloquence would be lost else."

"I promise I will, when I have given it up; but, cousin, would you mind our taking a cab? I am very tired."

Once in his room, Stewart unlocked his desk, and gave himself another forty drops of happiness in solution.

Then, for the hundredth time, he fell on his knees and told God all about it.

With his repeated failures he had grown more child-like, and more religious, but there was this difference: he never asked for help of God now; his were not prayers but confessions.

Stewart's enthusiasm for his work increased as time went on. Rightly or wrongly, he felt that he was to some extent making amends for his own wrecked life by being helpful to others; and wicked, deplorable, tragic as his life would probably be regarded by the majority of men, to him it was noble and of use.

The consciousness of his own failure softened him intensely where the sins of others were concerned. The surplice he wore at the bedside of the dying drunkard was simply the consciousness of a frailty common to both, and the Prayer Book from which he read, his own heart, written on by the finger of fate dipped in human tears. He was close to his people, and both he and they felt it.

CHAPTER XXII.

You will be asking "What of Dorothy?"

But for a transient thought, she had entirely disappeared from Stewart's horizon.

It is a peculiarity of the morphia maniac that the loves which are the heritage of the rest of the race have no hold upon him. He lives for himself, and his ideal.

Stewart had carefully put both Dorothy and Angus off the scent by dictating a letter which his cousin wrote asking for his whereabouts, and Angus too had given up by this time the search for him.

We must ask our readers to picture them leading, as far as all appearances went, the ordinary rural life of country folk. But as a matter of fact, she, poor child, was eating her heart away in silence, a modern heroine waiting in expectant passivity for her lover gone to do battle with himself; while Angus's sensations were divided between a hope that Stewart would come back restored and the fear that he might do so.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was an understood thing between Stewart and his cousin, that his syringe should be filled twice daily, and left in the drawer of his dressing-table ; hitherto all conversation on the subject had been carefully avoided. His own syringe, with which he more than made up for her deductions, was carefully hidden in his jewel-case.

One midday he had returned from his morning round among his people tired and depressed. Like the fatally hooked salmon, he had, that morning, made one more feeble effort to escape from his bondage, and taken a third of a grain less than his usual morning dose. Now, there was nothing possible but to make up for it by increasing his midday indulgence ; this was quickly done, with the inevitable result, a rapid walk up and down the room—the morphia maniac is never unoccupied while the drug is in him—and as he walked with his arms folded, and eyes downcast, he again reviewed his position. He had ceased to worry now, but had recognised and accepted the tragedy of his life as an unavoidable fact ; he had been helped into this state of mind by his work among the poor, by whom he was intensely loved, for reasons to be seen presently.

He had started by trying to be the guide and

counsellor of the dipsomaniac and fallen, and ended by being their friend only. He had encouraged them in their battle against their cursed heritage, only to find that, help them how you will, "the gods themselves cannot recall their gifts." To see the tragedy of his life as it was, you must remember that pleasure, as the rest of men understand it, was entirely a thing of the past; his old love of poetry, that once made life possible, was now but an echo, a half beautiful dream only. The inspiring drug found no life in him to stir with its peculiar omnipotence.

A little rap at the door interrupted his quietly sad review of his position, and upon opening it, a note was handed him by the servant. It was from his cousin, and ran as follows :

"I never like to talk to you, dear cousin, of the battle you're fighting so bravely and without complaint; but I must send up this little note to tell you how happy you are making papa and myself. I have decreased the dose much more rapidly than you told me, because I was in such a hurry to see you as of old. The worst is over now, my brave cousin; you have fought a good fight. From what the doctor told us your health is not injured, and God, in His own mysterious way, has, through your very fall, made you a fellow-worker with us in His vineyard.—Ever your Cousin."

Stewart crushed the letter in his hand, and stood face to face with his deceitful self. The faculty of self-dissection is a tragedy that God, in His infinite mercy, has withheld from the majority of men. The John of every-day life sees neither "John as he thinks he is, John

as his friends see him, nor John as he is—as his Maker sees him,” but simply John as he would have his friends see him. It is quite otherwise with the taker of opium. His conscience spares him not; his lights and shades are both dashed in with the heavy but lying hand of over-truthfulness.

With the reading of his cousin's letter, a perfect torrent of guilty consciousness swept away in one moment all Stewart's old excuses for himself, and he stood out a black, hideous failure, self-made. For some moments he leaned against the bed-post bewildered, and then the balm of these old words came back to him :

“ All that I would but could not be,
All that men despised in me,
That was I worth to God, who turned the potter's wheel.”

And then the lunch-bell rang.

As Stewart took his seat at the table, his cousin looked across to him (that one glance of hers was an appendix to her note), and said : “ I meant all I wrote, and I am so proud of you.”

Stewart took some soup only, and two glasses of sherry (these men don't eat !). As he was rising to go, his uncle said :

“ If you can spare me one moment, I should like to have a word with you, Paul, in the study.”

Once there, and the door closed, the old gentleman seized him by the hand, and, with a beaming face, said :

“ I can refrain no longer from congratulating you, my boy, upon the noble struggle you have been making these two months past. I have interfered no further than to pray daily that you might be helped through it,

and to thank God as I have heard of your good progress. The terrible time you have gone through will not have been misspent, if it removes old doubts that used to hang about you, and teaches you how good God is, and how greatly He helps those that help themselves. But, Paul, it was not my intention to talk to you of this ; I want to say something to you of your parish work, and your popularity among my poor. I don't know that I quite agree with the gospel you are teaching them, but, somehow, you are getting hold of their hearts. You were probably humanised by your fall into a vice, and strengthened by your struggle out of it. Struggle on, dear boy, and may God continue to help you, as He has done in the past."

Stewart shook his uncle's hand, and left him, and, putting on his hat, hurried from the Rectory. He hurried down the road with but one idea—to get away from the consciousness of his terrible hypocrisy.

Past experience had taught him that there was but one way of doing this, and that was to find, if possible, some sinner as great as himself, and to lose the identity of both by mingling their individualities.

Half an hour found him sitting by the bedside of an old drunkard who had spent most of his life in gaol, and lay there, unhelped of alcohol, in the dimmest twilight of his boisterous life. Stewart was the first gentleman with whom he had come in contact who had not lectured him, either from the bench or the pulpit.

The only religion Stewart ever talked to him was the religion of real life, and always founded upon biographical facts. One day he would take the life of Shelley, and

quote long stanzas to him ; then he would give pictures from Bret Harte ; sometimes he would make obvious the great humanity of the Pale Galilean. Burns, Coleridge, Dante, Rossetti, and even Byron had become familiar to the old fellow, and the tragic incidents of their lives engraved deeply into his memory by Stewart's intensity of recital. There were no weary hours for him now. Before Stewart's advent, he had often pined the whole night through for one more peep at the bar, one more good carouse ; but now he lay there in great content, and thought of those other chaps who had grown so familiar to him, and it seemed somehow as though he belonged to them.

"I am glad to see ye again, sir ; I didn't expect ye this afternoon. I reckon ye ain't been reading about any other poor fellow that went wrong that ye could tell me about ? I likes, somehow, to feel that I ain't the only one ; it does make the time pass nice !"

With a smile, Stewart drew a broken arm-chair to the bedside, and seating himself in it, with head thrown back, went through, apparently unconscious of the fact that he was not alone, the wild, weird story of Poe's life—one long-drawn hunger for appreciation and bread.

When Stewart had finished, the old fellow was silent for some moments. Here was another picture to hang in the gallery of his memory for future use. As Paul shook hands with the old fellow, he said :

"We can see, Dan, something of what the Almighty thinks of success by the kind of person He gives it to."

CHAPTER XXIV.

STEWART'S next visit to his old friend was rendered memorable by an incident that was destined to alter the whole course of his future. He found Dan sitting in bed, with a pair of old-fashioned circular glasses on, struggling with some verses written on half a sheet of note-paper.

"There's a poor gal upstairs who's pretty bad," he said, as Stewart seated himself by the bedside. "She's heard of you, and has sent this down for me to give you. She thinks you might be able to sell it for her. She calls it poetry."

Stewart took the paper and read as follows :

"UNFORTUNATE !

- " Oh, speak not to me of the sweet-smelling meadows,
The virginal beauties in springtime that throng,
The morning's clear smile, or the eve's striding shadows,
The night that hangs mute on the nightingale's song.
- " For me such things have been, but gone is the magic,
A dream that died slowly to waking's quick pain.
Gay prologue to scenes that rose sudden and tragic,
And prelude of bliss to drear agony's strain.
- " The lily of innocence, rose of life's gladness,
And green leaves of Hope that were bright with the dew,
I dragg'd like a posy to town, in my madness,
And hawk'd up and down in the street's idle view.

- "For poverty press'd, and the hunger of others,
And lives were at stake, for five pieces of gold;
Ye know not too well what ye buy, oh my brothers,
But less, oh! far less, do ye know what is sold.
- "I ask'd one to pity—to seek a new pleasure,
To pity and help me, and leave my soul free;
In life's dusty highway I show'd him a treasure,
A rose in its desert, a pearl in its sea.
- "A jewel worth stooping for, seizing and saving,
Amid the poor tinsel that gilded his path;
A joy to survive all his pleasures enslaving,
And gleam through the tempest of heaven's coming wrath.
- "I ask'd one for pity and help in this fashion;
A new light awoke in his lust-weary eyes,
My helplessness stirr'd the dull depths of his passion,
And cruelty added a zest to his prize.
- "I plunged through the firefold and left hope behind me,
My life was burnt up in one minute of doom;
No hope nor desire to the bleak world can bind me,
But pain's cruel finger and want's chilling gloom.
- "Yes! one thing can bring the lost vision before me,
And lull present thought with bright gleams of the past;
A strange sweet remembrance is hovering o'er me,
And dim grow my eyes, waving tears filling fast. •
- "As I see through their mist the old orchard in blossom,
Spring's breath sweeps the valley, the birds sing again,
And the flash and the roar of the mill-stream's vexed bosom
Return in the lip of this mantling champagne.—L. Y."

"I must see this girl," he said, "and at once. Can you send up word to ask if I may come?"

"It would be no good if I did, sir. She hates parsons, and thinks you are pretty much like the rest of them. No," the old fellow added, with a shake of his head, "there's only one chance of seeing her; and that is to go straight up."

This was the course Stewart adopted, and found a room furnished with an old iron bedstead, a broken chair, and a half-starved dog shivering in front of the empty fireplace. On the bed a girl lay. A few old and unpawnable skirts formed her only covering, and she to all appearances was very near her death. She was apparently about twenty-four years of age, with jet-black, untidy hair and unusually large black eyes ; her cheeks were sunken and showed the shape of her upper jaw ; her mouth large and truthful ; her hands were exquisitely moulded ; her fingers, long and attenuated, told a terrible tale of want and disease.

"I have come," Stewart said, "to tell you how much I like your verses. How long have you written poetry?"

"I am glad you like them," she said. "I have not written much, I only try to scribble when I am very, very miserable. The parish doctor was here yesterday and said that some brandy would do me good, but I had no money to get any. I had heard so much of you, and thought you might be able to sell my verses for me. I know they are not worth much."

"On the contrary, I think they are worth a good deal. I will gladly give you two pounds for them, and take the risk myself." Stewart took two sovereigns from his pocket, and the hungry eyes of the girl leapt in joyous anticipation of a meal for herself and the dog.

"Are you all alone here?"

"An old woman downstairs comes up two or three times a day ; and then I have Carl there—and you are good company, aren't you, old man, when you are well?"

At the mention of his name the dog pricked his ears,

and, dragging himself to the bedside, waited to be lifted. Once in the girl's bosom, and his feet well tucked under him, he opened one eye and looked at Stewart wistfully, as though wondering if *he* knew anything of cold and hunger.

"Might I not go out and get the brandy the doctor ordered you?" Stewart asked. "You appear to be in real need of it."

"But you are a clergyman, ain't you? You would not like to go into a public-house to buy brandy."

"I am only a half-bred clergyman; and if I were a bishop, I should have no hesitation. I will be back very soon."

In half an hour Stewart returned with a bottle of brandy, tins of soup, a loaf of bread, some butter, and little delicacies of the invalid order. He was followed upstairs by a man bringing coals and fire-lights. In two minutes Stewart's coat was off, and soon the room grew warm and bright beneath the unaccustomed influence of a large fire. The girl watched him closely as he put the little saucepan on to warm the soup, boiled some water for woman's inevitable tea, and made some toast.

While he waited for the water to boil, he put some of the cold, gelatinous soup upon another plate, and brought it to the bedside for the dog; and as the mongrel devoured it, the pair of them, approaching the scene from their own and not altogether dissimilar points of view, felt that all was not quite lost. One and, if the last, a clean love was left them. When Stewart had given her some brandy, and placed the food and tea within easy reach, he left her with a promise to see her again soon.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE day following Stewart found his new charge sitting over a large fire with one of the old skirts on, her hands down between her knees, looking for faces. Both she and the dog were brighter and healthier than yesterday.

"I have been wondering if you would come," she said, as she rose to meet him. "Will you have this chair? I will pull the bed over. You were so good to me yesterday, and I let you go without thanking you. I had a lump in my throat, and could not talk to you." Paul was silent as she continued: "I wonder if you know at all how happy you made me. I wonder if you know who and what I am, and I wonder more still if you would have been as kind if you had known."

"I am not better than my Master, child," Stewart replied; then after a moment, and very sadly, "Nor have I stones to throw."

The girl looked up at him quickly with the question, "Have you too sinned?" but the cloud of pain and sorrow that overshadowed Stewart's face forbade the asking.

"If we are going to be friends," she said, after another pause, "and you are going on with your goodness to me, may I tell you who and what I am? I shall feel happier, and shall not be deceiving you."

"Do," Stewart replied; "it may help me to help you."

The girl buried her face in her hands, and from between them said:

"It is so difficult now that your Church has given up the one Sacrament, that after the hope of heaven gave us women the most help on earth. Why can't we confess now? A sin once told is half removed. But you are not like other clergymen.

"Well, my name is Lettice Young. My father was a village schoolmaster. He was paralysed for three years, and died six months since. My mother died eight years ago. I have a younger sister who is well married, but does not speak or write to me. When my father was first disabled, I left home to try and work for him and my sister. We came to London. I went to a large shop in Oxford Street, and earned forty pounds a year. We tried very hard, the three of us, to live on this, but it was not possible; my sister, who was only sixteen, could do but little to help me. I walked home many a night wondering what could be done to raise our income and make happier my father's declining days. There was but one way, and I took it. I had youth and beauty then; I sold both. My father died in comfort without knowing it, and my sister, when she found it out, thought it vice only, and left me. There, that's all," she said, as she, for the first time, looked up. "I am better now I have told you. But perhaps you will have no more to do with me now."

"On the contrary, my poor child, I shall be the more anxious to shelter and help you, and it may be that some day I will tell you another story as sad."

On his way home, Stewart bought her a warm flannel dressing-gown and other little things to add to her comfort.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was three weeks since Lettice made her confession to Stewart. She had under the new *régime* improved greatly in health, and was well enough to come down into Dan's room ; this she always did when Stewart was expected.

It may have been a very morbid bond that held these three sinners together, but it was the only one possible, and very helpful to each. Especially to Stewart ; he would enter the room, silent, dejected, and sorrowful, but leave it with as much radiance as his long-drawn face was capable of wearing ; it was only during the recital of the stories that still obtained that he entirely lost sight of his wrecked self.

This day he came full of the tragedy of Coleridge's life, of whom of late he had read and thought much, and it was not many minutes before, in response to an invitation from both of them, he dashed into it. Without the evidence of Poe's weirdly dramatic stories, De Quincey's vividness of description, or the graphic horribleness of the "Ancient Mariner," there is abundant evidence that the taker of opium clothes his every thought, dream, and word with a realism peculiar to himself ; and Stewart this afternoon held his two listeners spell-bound from start to finish.

He began with the tiny boy of seven, who had wandered from home, and was lying asleep by the river's bank with his feet actually in the water and pulling the weeping willows over him for blankets, while the town crier with cocked hat, gold lace, bell and all, marched up

and down the street with his sonorous cry—a cry that has echoed through many, many a heart, and all the years, “Lost, lost, Sammy Coleridge. Lost, lost, Sammy Coleridge.” Then to the first night in London, spent on a doorstep in Chancery Lane, doling out his few pence to passing beggars ; on to Cambridge, Bristol, and the dream of a new religion and all the glorious fellowship of genius there, and Amos Cottel to take notes ; then the first experience of opium, taken unwittingly as “ Kendal’s black drops ” ; then the gradual enslavement, the ever renewed effort to unwind the chain, and then his death ; all was told with an intensity begotten of fellow-feeling, and heard so.

There was a long silence when Stewart had finished, broken at length by Dan :

“The last time you told me about him, sir, you said he used to preach. I reckon that was when he was not taking opium.”

“No,” Stewart replied ; “he continued to preach long after he became a slave to the drug, and wrote sermons ‘for lazy clergymen’ to the last.”

“That’s queer,” said Dan, “and not a bit like the chaps who drink. Now, when I used to be knocking off the liquor, and saw a beer-barrel, I at first felt thirsty. Remembering I wasn’t taking any, I wanted to turn it on end and preach from it ; but I never wanted to preach when I was drinking.”

Then Lettice looked up and said :

“This question of preaching is a very interesting one, and very puzzling. As you very properly say, Mr. Stewart, it is entirely in the hands of a body of gentlemen who know nothing of the requirements of

that part of their audience who most need help. Then it appears to me that they have substituted the flowery nothingness of rhetoric, or the dry husks of doctrine, for the fruit—love and helpfulness. Picture Coleridge, with the vice fully hold of him, sitting in the Surrey Tabernacle listening to a dissertation on baptismal regeneration ; or Poe, when in the midst of one of his battles against self, to the little witticisms that emanate from Holborn Viaduct. ‘Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest,’ was an invitation that ran through my mind for weeks, until I had to go. I went to a High Church near me, and saw some gaudy theatricals, and heard a heart-and-soulless mumbling of prayers, and came out asking myself if Christ suffered and died for purposes of millinery——”

“You must not,” Paul interrupted, “be too hard upon our clergy ; their very training precludes their being in touch with their people. It is only in Carlyle’s ‘Sanctuary of Sorrow’ that one can learn to help the sorrowful. How well the Pale Galilean, when He selected His disciples, knew this. Picture ‘the rich young man’ in that band of enthusiasts.” Then, after a considerable pause, during which each member of our strange trio was wondering what influence the right man might have had upon their destinies, Stewart continued : “No ; the clergy, as a well-trained moral police force, are perhaps indispensable, but nowadays they know nothing of religion as we want it. It is said that the inspired artist is he who can look upon a face divine until, through all hindrances, he sees the man behind it. ’Tis so the Bible should be looked at. ’Twas the under-current of sin and discord in David’s life that formed the

basis of that yearning after righteousness that the Psalms breathe. Peter, Judas, Paul, Mahomet, Luther, Swedenborg—you may take the whole of them—and what a contrast they form with the smooth-faced mediocracy that fill our churches to-day. But does not the stupidity of the mass prove beyond doubt that there is such a thing as design in Nature ; just as the density of the cart-horse secures agriculture ? Even your microscopist, who spends a lifetime in weighing the excreta of worms, is a part of the divine order of things. But I must leave you. Some day I will tell you of a clergyman I know in Australia who, by simply ‘living the life,’ humanised a whole camp of miners. He was the only man I have met in the flesh who was entirely after God’s own heart ; and yet he played cards and drank beer with them. They sent a deputation to him one morning, to ask if he did not think that, after the way Bowser Allen had gone on, he oughtn’t to marry that gall ? ‘Yes,’ was the only reply. Within three hours every mine was empty, and the men, with band and flags, were marching churchward, with Bowser and his victim leading. My friend was waiting in the little church that he and his congregation had built with their own hands. A religious silence held possession of this strange congregation, until, in reply to the question, ‘Wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife ?’ Bowser, with an assumption of acquiescence, said, ‘I will.’ Then a laugh of half-derision ran through the whole church, and some one near the door shouted out, ‘You’ve got to !’ But I must leave you. Good-bye.”

Stewart shook hands with both, and was gone.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE following three months of Stewart's life were half light—the sombre light derived from his care-taking of Lettice and Dan, and half shadow—the shadow of his deception at home.

His charges were really happy ; the greater part of Stewart's income, which was under two hundred a year, was devoted to their requirements. Dan's room had been made comfortable, while Lettice's was quite a picture of neatness and respectability ; the walls had been papered, the floor carpeted, a good deal of second-hand furniture bought, and a folding bedstead substituted for the iron one. It was in this room that Stewart spent most of his afternoons—wrote his sermons, thought his thoughts, and dreamt his day-dreams—while growing stronger, and even gathering colour, the girl moved noiselessly about, or made tea for him.

Lettice Young's life, so far, had been spent in the effort to live ; love had had no share in it. Just when her great, and greatly pure, womanly instincts were about to bloom forth, necessity had transplanted her into the back-garden of vice, where love dies of inanition ; but the root was still there, and alive, and under the influence of Stewart's kindness she found it, to

her sorrow, throwing forth buds of Hope ; to her sorrow, because her inner consciousness told her that Hope for her was out of the question. Nor did Stewart's behaviour encourage her—he was always kind, thoughtful, and even tender towards her ; but there was a marked absence of that subtle something that draws wholesome men and women together, and for which the reformed Lettice was beginning to thirst.

Stewart's feelings towards Lettice were strange and difficult of definition ; as far as the common humanity went she was close to him ; but from every other point of view she was a long, long way off. He knew nothing of passion as the rest of the world knows it, it died with his manhood ; and while she, poor child, was from the sofa looking at him from over her book with eyes that to other men would have told the story of her love, he, with his eyes closed and his head thrown back in the arm-chair, was wandering about the graveyard of his youth where lay buried all the glorious dreams and hopes and aspirations of those glad days.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PAUL's deception at home had been so far quite successful, but the slowness of his recovery and his still prevailing tendency to sleep had much astonished his uncle and cousin ; twice had they consulted the specialist, and twice had they indignantly denied the possibility of his taking the drug secretly.

But at last the crash came, and a terrible crash it was. 'Twas the old story ; Stewart had grown careless, a chemist's bill had been forgotten and, sent to the house, fell into his uncle's hands. Stewart had returned to lunch—a lunch that was never eaten. As he closed the front door, the servant told him that his uncle was anxious to see him the moment he came in ; thinking it was of some parish work he was to hear, Stewart made for the study.

He found his uncle leaning over the table with his face covered by his hands ; the old gentleman had learnt to love his nephew very much, and the shock was appalling.

"Will you take a seat, Paul, and look this bill over, and tell me if you know anything about it?"

Paul took the bill with a trembling hand ; it needed no looking over, one glance at it told the whole story. Again his sin had found him out, and deception was out of the question.

For some seconds no word was spoken by either of them, then the old gentleman looked up and asked : "Is this so, Paul ? Have you been taking the drug secretly ?"

"I have," Paul answered, without looking up.

"And adding to that tremendous sin the sin of deceiving us, and the still greater one of posing as a leader of men ?"

"I have."

"And have you nothing to say by way of self-excuse ? I would so gladly hear you say something that would make this terrible blow lighter for me." And the old gentleman turned to Stewart with the anxiety of a father.

"I have nothing to say by way of excuse."

"Then do I understand that you admit yourself to be a living lie, walking about among my people in priest's clothing—that you, while telling these dying people to whom I have sent you of our Master and His love for them, you have been His secret foe, and unworthy to touch their horny hands ?"

"'Tis perfectly true," Stewart answered. "I have, as you say, been a living lie dressed in priest's clothing, and I have no excuse to make. If God was half as good as you teach, He would have let me die two years ago, before I had sunk to this. Yes, I have been a living lie, dressed up as a clergyman. I have endeavoured to guide men heavenward, and yet been myself all the while consciously drifting to hell. I have deceived you and my cousin, and forfeited your respect and love. But, my dear uncle, you must, for my sake, remember what this vice, as you—and perhaps rightly—call it, has cost me. It has been the constant east wind of my life, that has

withered up all hope, all capacities, and all loves, and I stand alone, absolutely alone—a friendless wreck. However, thank God it is nearly over now !” Then suddenly Paul changed his manner, and moving over to his uncle, he said, with some firmness : “ Will you take my hand, uncle, and let me thank you for your great goodness to me ; and will you, when you think of me, remember, in days to come, that it is your pity rather than your censure that I am entitled to ? ”

The old man rose, and, taking his nephew’s hand in his, said :

“ I blame you very much, Paul, but I pity you infinitely. But what are you going to do ? There is obviously but one course open to you, and that is to place yourself under control. This is the advice, and has been for a long time past, of the doctor I have consulted about you. But we will talk of this presently ; let us go to lunch, Paul,” said the old gentleman, as with infinite tenderness he put his hand upon his shoulder, and turned him towards the door. “ This has been one of the most painful days of my life, but I will say no more of it, if only you will be brave now. For my sake you will do this, won’t you ? ”

“ Will you excuse me from talking of it now, and will you excuse me from lunch, and make my excuses to my cousin ? I want to be alone.”

Half an hour after, Stewart’s cousin, prompted by her good heart, sought his room, bursting with a woman’s desire to be of help to him. But the room was empty. Stewart had fled.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"WHY, Dan, I declare if here isn't a cab coming down our street! Now that isn't common, is it? We're getting quite aristocratic. Gracious me, it's going to stop at our door! Who can it be? I declare it's Mr. Stewart, and he looks awful—as white as a ghost!"

The next moment the girl was at the front door, and had taken Stewart's purse, to pay the cabman. Then she, without a word, gave him her arm, and half carrying, half leaning, got him to her room.

Stewart sank exhausted on the sofa, and motioning to the girl to go and to close the door, took from his pocket his syringe and morphia, and gave himself a larger dose than usual.

"That," he said, "should be sufficient to assist me in my decision. But why should I hesitate? Life has nothing left for me. But then the doing of it? How strange it is," he continued, "the lives that are the least worth having, are the most tenaciously clung to!"

He walked to the window, and watched the scene below. A lot of half-starved, ragged children were playing in the gutter.

In every doorway a slovenly woman holding her child was framed; every here and there a man was crawling home from work, tired and dejected.

"There is not a life among them," he thought to himself, "worth having, and yet how they cling to them! And here mine is infinitely worse than theirs, and I hesitate. I feel like the scapegoat of the Israelites, without the redeeming feature of other people's sins to carry; the sins are all my own!"

Then Stewart went down to Dan's room, knowing Lettice was there, and drawing his old seat up to the fire as though nothing unusual had happened, they, as a matter of habit, followed his example.

"Lettice," he said, "make some tea while Dan and I fill our pipes. I have a new story to tell you."

When all was ready, Stewart started upon the tragedy of a young, hopeful life wrecked by opium. No detail was omitted; the story of the childhood, early loves, the fire, the drug, the struggle against it, Dorothy, all was told with the graphic horror of personal experience.

"Excuse me, sir," said Dan, "did I understand you that you knew this man?"

"I knew of him, Dan. Some friends of mine knew him very well. But, Lettice, let us go upstairs. I want a few minutes' chat with you."

Once in the room, Stewart closed the door, and placing her a chair, put one for himself exactly in front of it; but, instead of taking it, threw himself on the sofa in a state of absolute exhaustion. He was in such a condition, morally and physically, now, that the mere recital of the incidents of his own career had eaten up the alkaloid and left him bankrupt.

"You must give me some of your brandy, Lettice.

I am not well this afternoon, and I have something of great importance to say to you."

The frightened girl did as she was bid, and Stewart lay calm for a few minutes ; then opening his eyes, he asked :

"Did you like my story this afternoon ?"

"I did and I didn't."

"Why didn't you ?"

"You told it in such a way that one might almost have thought you were the man."

"And if I *were* the man, Lettice, then——"

"Then, my heart would break for you."

"Give me some more brandy, Lettice ; my heart is stopping again."

He drank at a gulp nearly half a tumblerfull. (Brandy is a plaything among stimulants to the taker of opium.) Then Stewart looked up at her, and in a hoarse whisper said :

"I *am* the man, Lettice, and for the second time my sin has found me out. I have this afternoon left the Rectory—the only home I have on earth—and I have come to you. Will you take care of me ? Will you bear with me and nurse me ?"

Stealthily the girl's hand crept into his, and the mere touch of it awakened all that was left of Stewart's goodness ; he broke into a fit of hysterical sobs, that gradually died away into an unquiet sleep. With loving tenderness the girl covered him with the quilt he had bought for her, and, taking up her position at his side, watched him through her tears.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE prevailing feeling that lay at the bottom of Lettice's heart as she sat there and watched Paul twist, and groan, and mutter in his howling wilderness of sleep, was one of thankfulness that she had at last discovered beneath his tender goodness to her a stratum of frailty common to both. Hitherto he had appeared to her too much as though cut from pure white marble to demand her entire love, and she, woman-like, had pined for the presence of some dark veins of shadow through it to relieve its monotony ; and now the shadows had come with a rush, and out of them the poor girl sat there weaving the bonds that, in years to come, might hold them together.

Strange as it may appear, the life this poor girl had led had not greatly injured the better parts of her. She had, when she entered upon that path, and still but a child, packed them all up and hidden them beneath an exterior of callous indifference, never expecting to need them again ; but with the coming of Stewart came the need of them, and their unpacking, followed by the discovery that they were all too crude and uncultivated. Then, for the first time, into her life regret came creeping ; hitherto she had spurned the thought of it, as being weak and cowardly. " I deliberately chose my

path, as the only one that led from starvation, and why look back?" she had constantly said to herself.

But, with the dawn of this new possibility—the possibility of winning the clean, unselfish love of a man—came a terrible feeling of far-offness. All this had in one five minutes been removed by Stewart's confession; and now, although her idol's feet had turned out to be clay, he was still her idol, and deliciously nearer her.

Presently Stewart's eyes opened, and he stared vaguely round the room endeavouring to pick up something of the past; then they fell upon the face of the girl, and he closed them, and slowly the past came back to him; and what a hideous past it was, what a terrible present, and, worst of all, what a hopeless future!

"Did I sleep quietly, Lettice?"

"Oh, no, no, you were so restless."

"Did I talk of any one?"

"You muttered of some one, I did not catch the name, it was Pro—— something."

"Oh yes, I know, Prometheus—some day I must tell you all about him—the gods chained him to a rock and around him the cruel waves dashed. He was rescued in the end, though, by one of the kindly gods who undertook such missions; but that division of the riches," Stewart continued after a pause, "died out centuries ago, probably from overwork. But, Lettice, I want to talk to you about myself. I am very, very ill; can I stay here with you, and will you nurse me, and will you be kind to me?"

"Oh! Mr. Stewart, why do you ask this, when you know that you have saved my life, and brought into it all the sunshine it ever had?"

"Ah, but, child, I deserve no credit for anything I have done for you. What you thought goodness to you was nothing but a sedative to my own conscience—an effort to drown the constant picture of my own failure. No, Lettice, I must be candid and truthful to you. I bring you the remnants of a wrecked life. Will you, I ask you again, take care of them? Wet the corner of your towel, child, and wipe my forehead; it is so stiff and uncomfortable. Thank you so much. Now kneel down by the side of me, and take my hand in yours."

The big, wonderful eyes that grew larger and larger as he neared the great unknown; the deepening hollows of his cheeks—sorrow-dug; his breath that came and went fitfully, told, all too plainly, that his life *was* wrecked, and that but little of the tragedy remained unacted. The curtain might fall at any moment upon an all but empty stage.

"How dark it is growing, Lettice!"

"Yes. Shall I draw the curtains and light the lamp?"

"No, no, child, you must not leave me for a moment. Nor would I have the night shut out;" then after a pause, "'tis my last."

For hours Lettice knelt there, with her hand in his, and prayed as woman never prayed before, prayers that were three parts protest. Slowly the darkness environed them; the children's voices died away from the gutters below; the street sounds ceased, and the girl was alone

with her love, and he again asleep and breathing stertorously. When she could do so with safety, she stealthily withdrew her hand, and creeping to the fireplace, made up the fire and sat on the hearthrug before it. She had not been there a minute, before the dog, forgotten for the first time in his life, crept near her, and looking wistfully into her face, asked what was the matter; and she, with a feeling of guilt, took him on to her lap and told him apologetically the whole story as she had told him many a one before, but never one like this; and the dog, knowing all, looked up to her face with eyes full of sympathy, and then licked her hand.

All night Lettice sat there watching her two loves, revolving many memories. And as the morning broke dull and gray she crept to the window and saw the young day—wrapped in misty swaddling-clothes of a people's sighs—start on his little tragedy. She saw men, tired men, crawl forth to work—hunger-led. Through the window of the house opposite she could see a half-dressed woman, with a weazen-faced baby on her arm, making the fire for her husband's breakfast. The dog was curled up at her feet, and behind her Stewart still asleep, and breathing audibly. 'Twas a sad scene the young girl saw, set to sad music, and all that it wanted to make it perfect was the sixth sense of appreciation; and that, too, Lettice had been given. Suddenly the dog awoke with a start, and she, knowing it meant something, turned and saw Stewart on his feet supporting himself by his left hand; his right was held edgeways against his brow, and from beneath it he was staring with eyes that were now widely dilated,

past Lettice, through the window, at something far, far away. He was in the last hyper-sensitive spasm of opium poisoning, with the body almost dead, and the mind making its final effort.

She would have rushed to him, but he, with a motion of the hand, prevented her.

"'Sh! 'sh!" he said, with a hand upon his neck and a shake of the head :

"The fog's in my throat, and a mist in my face;
The tokens denote I am nearing the place."

Then he staggered, and the girl rushed to save him ; but he recovered himself, and pushed her away almost roughly. Then he laughed hysterically, and continued :

"I was ever a fighter ; one fight more, the best and the last,
I should hate that Death bandaged my eyes and bade me creep
past.
Let me——"

"Let me, let me——" The quotation was finished, not in idle words, but in actual deed, for the spasm was over. And upon the sofa Stewart lay dead ; over him the broken-hearted girl hung ; at her side the dog whined, while in the street below cabs rattled past.

THE END

